

CITIZEN SATIRE IN MALAYSIA AND
SINGAPORE: WHY AND HOW SOCIO-POLITICAL
HUMOUR COMMUNICATES DISSENT ON
FACEBOOK

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Abbreviations

1MDB	1 Malaysia Development Berhad
AFP	<i>Agence France-Presse</i>
BN	<i>Barisan Nasional</i> (National Front)
CCWM	Curi-curi Wang Malaysia
CNY	Chinese New Year
CPF	Central Provident Fund
DAP	Democratic Action Party
ETP	Economic Transformation Programme
FB	Facebook
HDB	Housing Development Board
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabets
IPS	The Institute of Policy Studies
ISA	Internal Security Act
Imao	laugh my ass off
lol	Laugh out loud
LTA	Land Transport Authorities
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MDA	Media Development Authority
MND	Ministry of National Development
MRT	Mass Rapid Transit
MRT	Mass Rapid Transit
MSC	Multimedia Super Corridor
NA	Not available
NSA	National Security Agency
NSTP	The New Straits Times Press
OB	Out-of-bounds
PAP	People's Action Party
PKR	<i>Parti Keadilan Rakyat</i>
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party)
PMET	Professionals, managers, executives and technicians
PR	Permanent Resident
PRC	People's Republic of China
R&D	Research and Development
RSF	<i>Reporters sans frontières</i> (Reporters Without Borders)
RTM	<i>Radio Televisyen Malaysia</i>
SBC	Singapore Broadcasting Corporation
SIA	Singapore International Airlines, now known simply as Singapore Airlines
SPH	Singapore Press Holdings
TCS	Television Corporation of Singapore
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation

Summary

“Citizen satire” is derived from “citizen journalism”, a term which describes the democratising characteristic of the Internet that allows citizens to decide for themselves what constitutes news (Higgie, 2015). In the same way, citizen satire is the democratised use of satire as part of “silly citizenship” (Hartley, 2010) to engage with politics through social media. This study explores the role of playful acts in civic discourse through four case studies of visual memes in Malaysia and Singapore. These two countries were chosen for their hybrid political nature, which places them as neither fully open nor fully authoritarian. The cases were selected based on the significance of the media events that the satire was based upon. Using an online ethnographical approach, two sites were located in Singapore (SMRT memes and SGAG’s response to the 6.9 million population White Paper) and two more in Malaysia (Prime Minister Najib’s *kangkung* memes and Teresa Kok’s ONEderful Malaysia YouTube video). Anderson’s (2012) media compass points comprising properties, processes, consequences and character, provided the scaffold for mapping the mediascape of the citizen satire at these ethnographic sites. Two overarching questions frame this thesis:

- Why do citizens use satire on Facebook to communicate their political opinions?
- How does citizen satire on Facebook contribute to civic discourse?

Evidence that shows citizen satire can be a form of “defensive” weapon, as opposed to the traditional “offensive” or “passive/subversive” classification, was found. Also, the uses of citizen satire in these contexts were not forms of activism but bear closer resemblance to “heckling”. Although citizen satire fulfils important social functions in terms of building solidarity within the sites, as a social force, it is weak and appears to impact socio-political policies only indirectly and from a distance. However, there is evidence of political engagement among citizens resulting from the comments surrounding the memes posted within the sites. This data reinforces Buturoiu’s (2014, p. 47) metaphor of various online “working rooms” particularly on Facebook, serving as multiple smaller public spheres.

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1 Introduction

On May 6, 2014, Malaysian Member of Parliament Teresa Kok was charged over a video she posted on Facebook and YouTube (Palani, 2014). On 11 February the following year, Malaysian cartoonist Zulkifli Anwar Ulhaque – also known as Zunar – was taken into custody after using Twitter to criticise the jailing of opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim. His cartoon satire book on the Prime Minister's wife was seized by the police just a few days ahead of its launch (Jalil, 2015). In Singapore, the courts ruled in November 2014 that blogger Roy Ngerng defamed Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in May by suggesting the Prime Minister misappropriated Central Provident Fund (CPF) savings (Tham, 2015). When 16-year-old Singaporean Amos Yee called Lee Kuan Yew "a horrible person" on his personal website, shortly after the former Prime Minister of Singapore passed away, and when he also posted a crude drawing of Lee having sex with former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Yee was arrested and charged (Sin, 2015).

These are but some examples of harsh actions taken by the authorities of Malaysia and Singapore against outspoken citizens. International groups have criticised the governments for what they consider as violations of human rights and freedom of expression (Amnesty International, 2015a; CJFE, 2015; HRW, 2015). Although newspapers and journalists have been known in the past to have been sued or charged for some of the things they wrote and published, what set the examples in this thesis apart is that these are individual citizens who are defying the social norm of remaining silent and not criticising those in power. There are good indications that such defiance can only occur because it is facilitated by, if not directly caused by the Internet, which eroded traditional boundaries of what can or cannot be said. This possible connection is worth closer scholarly attention.

As one born and raised in Malaysia, and as one who has spent much of my adult life in Singapore, where I attended university and where I hold Permanent Resident status, I have observed a gradual shift in the public discourse over the last decade or so, from being generally docile and compliant to being more strident and forthright. In Malaysia, I attribute much of this shift to the sacking of former Deputy

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in 1998, a move that is still widely regarded as politically motivated¹ (BBC, 2015). The shift in Singapore, I argue, occurred much later when the public rail system had a major breakdown (see Chapter 4), marking the start of a proliferation of negative public comments about the People's Action Party (PAP) online.

Criticisms of the governments in power were previously muted and mostly in private. The use of the Internal Security Act (ISA) – which allows detention without trial – by both countries had successfully created a climate of fear (C. Lim, 2010). In Singapore, Operation Cold Store 1963 saw 113 people, allegedly Communists, arrested (HistorySG, 2015; Ramakrishna, 2015). Among those held for decades without trial was Chia Thye Poh, who served much of his 23-year detention without trial in solitary confinement (AFP, 2015). The allegations against him were never proven in court. Mahathir Mohammad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia at the time, executed a similar manoeuvre named Operation Lalang² in 1987 (Brown, 2005; Soong, 1989). The official reason for the arrests was to prevent a repeat of the May 13 race riot in 1969 as racial tension rose. I was 20 years old at that time, and can recall the fear that permeated our community, as people known to me, or known to people I knew, for instance several church leaders, were detained. Then there were the jokes shared in hushed whispers, like UMNO (the dominant Malay ruling party) being the abbreviation for “Under Mahathir, No Objections”.

In addition to the social contextual factors described above, my preliminary postulation traces this shift in the public discourse back to the introduction of the Internet as the enabling technology. The governments of both countries recognised the economic potential of the Internet and flirted with the idea of relaxing their control over this new medium (see section 1.3.3 for a detailed discussion). I argue that it was this relaxation that led to the gradual emergence of the critical voices. The Internet also exposed citizens, particularly the younger ones who have yet to subscribe to orthodox views that my

¹ Anwar Ibrahim was the deputy prime minister. It is widely believed Anwar and then prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad, had sharp disagreement on matters of reforms and cronyism. In 1998 he was investigated for sodomy but subsequently charged with corruption. Anwar described the charges against him as a “political conspiracy”, an allegation supported by the Human Rights Watch (see <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-10/anwar-ibrahim/6083644>).

² “Lalang” (*Imperata arundinacea*) a Malaysian grass that is tall and coarse, considered a weed.

generation grew up with, to alternative views and interpretations of the national and historical events promoted and disseminated by the respective governments.

1.1 Malaysia and Singapore as joint sites for this study

My family and I have lived and worked in both countries, and we have moved seamlessly back and forth between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. My experience is not unique as a large number of the resident population in Singapore is from Malaysia. Around 23 per cent of the resident population in Singapore, which includes Singaporeans and permanent residents (PRs), were not born in Singapore, and Malaysians form 45 per cent of that number (Department of Statistics, 2010). Economically, culturally, historically and politically, the two countries are closely linked, much like Australia and New Zealand, or the USA and Canada. Singapore was part of the Malaysian Federation up to 1965, when it was ejected (or when it pulled out, depending on the Singapore or Malaysian perspective one chooses):

Fifty years ago, Singapore was ejected from the Malaysian Federation. The two countries have since travelled very divergent paths while sharing some common characteristics. Both countries were colonised by the British, both were occupied by the Japanese during the World War II, both are multi-racial and multi-religious, and both have experienced considerable economic improvement since independence.

(Krishnadas, 2015)

The close relationship of the two countries makes their pairing for comparative studies common in research of all disciplines (Hefner, 2001; L. Y. Lim & Pang, 1991; McMinn et al., 2001; Platt, 1982; Sparke, Sidaway, Bunnell, & Grundy-Warr, 2004). Because the two countries share a common root, the divergent paths they took have led to frequent speculation by Malaysians that Singapore's success could have been Malaysia's had the former Federation adopted Lee Kuan Yew's (and by extension, Singapore's) meritocratic blueprint. Similarly, Malaysia is often used as an example by Singapore to show how much poorer Singapore would be had they not rejected the affirmative policies that Malaysia enacted to protect the Malays and other indigenous groups. Often these comparative studies are attempts to show the other country as some sort of alternative universe that can provide some predictive power if option B is chosen rather than option A. From my personal standpoint, although these remain speculative they nevertheless show how interwoven the two countries' politics and

economies are. As someone who has lived in both countries for a significant period, I view the two countries as part of the extended context in which I am located and therefore both reasonably form viable sites for the object of my study. It is for this reason that the present study is not a comparative study. There is, however, value in situating this research at multiple sites, and the theoretical and methodological justifications will be further discussed in Chapter 3 (see 3.2.3 Multi-sited Ethnography).

1.2 Citizen satire as the object of study

Many of the jailed or harassed citizens noted above used humour to express their dissent. To understand why they do so, McLuhan's "the medium is the message" (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967) becomes a useful notion to underpin this study. He argued that "the personal and social consequences of any medium" are extensions of ourselves that in turn further extend our affairs. In Malaysia and Singapore, I perceive that the introduction of the Internet has changed the way the way we interact with one another, the way we view politicians and politics and in general the way we do politics, and that in turn changes the way the Internet is used. Political jokes, satire and humour in general have always been around but their remediated form online has seemingly had an impact that is difficult to quantify. As a part of a bigger picture (the Internet being both the medium and the message) that is currently of so much interest to scholars, political satire is lurking in a corner of scholarship and largely overlooked.

1.2.1 The motivation for this research: an analogy

The motivation for this research project could be illustrated by an analogy of a journalist chancing upon a street fight between unequal contestants. The fight is all the more interesting because the underdog's choice of weapon is not a sword or gun but a rubber ducky. The use of a rubber ducky, a toy more suited for the amusement of children rather than self-defence, would naturally prompt questions like why would one choose it? How can it possibly be used in a fight? The focus is not on the nature and properties of the unusual weapon of choice (What is a rubber ducky? What are rubber duckies for? What is it made of? etc.) Rather, the main question is about why it was chosen and how it was used? Carrying the analogy across to this thesis, the nature of humour, being the weapon, is not the object of

study even though it is the main aesthetic category of this study. An examination of what is humour and how it works is necessary and will be discussed in the Literature Review (see Chapter 2). However, in the case studies, the focus is on why and how humour is used to communicate. More specifically, the research question is framed as: how do citizens of these two countries circumvent restrictions on their expression of opinions to communicate dissent and how, at the very least, is humour utilised to make the producers feel better about their circumstances, even if being heard is not guaranteed. Specific attention is given to understanding how the tradition of using visual political humour is inflected in digital media and how it impacts the relations between humour and political power.

A temptation for researchers embarking on a project of this nature is to make claims about what humour can do, as humour is often treated seriously and taken as politically powerful, as evidenced by the over-reactions of politicians who are targeted. Effects are hard to prove and empirical data generally do not provide causal connections due to the many confounding factors that muddy the waters. This thesis is therefore a bit more cautious about making such claims and focuses on questions of how humour is used instead. It is also tempting, in situations like this, to define humour by outlining what it is not rather than what it is.

1.2.2 Research questions

In order to understand what political humour is rather than what it is not, deliberate effort has been put into the thesis to highlight what people are doing online in socio-political contexts in order to understand what kind of power can be ascribed to online humour in Singapore and Malaysia. Did the people who posted these humorous memes see themselves as activists? Did they resort to political humour as a passive-subversive tool? Or perhaps humour was used as a weapon of attack against the politically powerful? Do citizen satirists see themselves as powerful people? And is there evidence that political humour promotes political engagement? These various questions can be further summarised as two overarching research questions that frame this thesis:

- Why do citizens use satire on Facebook to communicate their political opinions?

- How does citizen satire on Facebook contribute to civic discourse?

To answer these two questions, four case studies of citizen satire from Facebook will be selected and examined for their contents, message, and the reactions they receive from viewers.

1.2.2.1 *Definitions of key terms used*

Attardo, in Anolli et al. (2002, p. 160) has described the field as “plagued by definitional problems” because terms such as humour, joke, funnies, satire, parody, irony and their multitude of synonyms are all folk concepts with “fuzzy boundaries” and as such any attempt to do so is fraught. “Humour” in itself is a subjective term, and even though laughter is a common measure for its detection, many examples, like dark satire, are often not funny and do not provoke laughter. (A fuller discussion of the role of laughter in humour is found in 2.3.1 The essence of humour.) For the purpose of this thesis, a more useful defining characteristic of humour is the playful intent (as conceptualised by Hartley, 2010) within the communication. Political humour is therefore taken as a playful commentary of a socio-political nature. Occasionally, the terms “fun”, “funny”, “funniness” and “funnies” are used in the folk sense to refer to how a native of the site may understand humour, regardless of whether the message evokes laughter or not and if and when used in this thesis, it is taken in the same vernacular sense.

“Citizen satire” is borrowed from Higgle (2015) to describe a particular genre of humour. To Higgle what is being done by these “satirists, formerly known as the audience” is patterned after “citizen journalism”, a term used to encapsulate the democratisation of the media arising from the digital age. Citizen journalism is commonly attributed to Oh Yeon Ho, founder of Korea’s OhmyNews, who said in 2000 “every citizen is a reporter”.³ Higgle (2015) argues that citizen journalism is known for *gatewatching*, which Bruns (2008) defines as the “ability of users to decide for themselves what they find interesting and worth noting and sharing with their peers” (p.74), as opposed to traditional journalism that exemplifies *gatekeeping*, where the journalist makes the professional decision of what is newsworthy. Employing the same logic, citizen satire is “user-generated satire that not only mocks

³ However, it cannot be confirmed that no one used the term before him (Gillmor, 2008).

and plays, but also makes a strong political critique” (Higgle, 2015, p. 6). She also argues that it is a subset of Hartley’s (2010) “silly citizenship”, a model that acknowledges the role of playful acts in civic discourse.

The “satire” component could be clarified somewhat to distinguish it from other terms like parody and irony, with which it is often used interchangeably, again due to their derivation from the vernacular rather than scholarly nomenclature. It may be useful to employ Barthes’ (1977 [1964]) idea of intertextuality to form some basis of understanding these genres in an attempt to disambiguate them for the purpose of this thesis.

In Barthes’ opinion every text is a “multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (1977 [1964], p.146). Authors borrow and transform texts, readers reference one text when reading another and the audience is constantly being challenged to recognise the source text. Arising from Barthes’ notion, Dentith (2000, p.2) understands *parody* as a form of intertextual referencing where a cultural production or practice is imitated. Norrick (1989) sees parody as an invitation to the audience to join in the caricaturising of the referenced text. What distinguishes satire from parody (according to Kernan, 1959) is the sting or barb that is usually absent in parodies but always in satire. In contrast, parodies’ invitation to the intertextual reference can almost be described as affectionate. Krutnik and Neale (2006), on the other hand, see satire as humour that draws on social conventions whilst parody draws on aesthetic ones. Anolli et al. (2002) defines *irony* as “an utterance expressing the opposite of its literal meaning” (p. 136). Day (2011) sees irony, satire and parody as having less clearly defined parameters when she described the present-day renaissance of political discourse on the *satiric register*. She notes that emerging genres of fake or parodic news programmes, “the satiric documentary”, and “ironic, media-savvy activism” have overlapping characteristics of satire, irony and parody and, like Attardo, is not particularly concerned with defining them in absolute terms (pp.24-42). A further discussion of satire is found in 2.3.2.2 Graphic/Visual satire and 2.3.2.3 Literary Satire and 2.3.2.4 Satire in the 21st century.

1.3 The restricted media of Malaysia and Singapore

In order to bring into focus my object of study, a discussion of some historical context of citizen satire is necessary. Classification of regimes used to be straightforward: The United States is a democracy, the Soviet Union is not. However, from the first half of the 20th century, the decolonisation of many countries resulted in new nations that could not fit neatly into these categories and it became helpful to view systems of government as a continuum instead of a dichotomy of the two categories. Diamond (2002) identified seven countries of that period as “multiparty, electoral, but undemocratic regimes” (p.23). Today, only three of Diamond’s original seven – Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Malaysia and Singapore – remain as “hybrid regimes”, with the rest – Mexico, Senegal, South Africa, and Taiwan – having transitioned into more orthodox forms of democracies.

This hybrid democracy or “soft authoritarianism” (Means, 1996) is marked by a tension between balancing political control and neoliberal economics. Under majoritarian governments, the façade of political pluralism is achieved through the acquiescence of weak opposition parties that are never allowed to come to power.⁴ Two of these three hybrid regimes, Malaysia and Singapore, were among the “Asian Tigers” (Davis & Gonzales, 2003 p. 51) that saw extraordinary economic growth in the last decades of the 20th century.⁵ At the same time, significant infringements of their citizens’ liberty occurred during this period, as stated at the opening of this chapter.

Since the first publication of Reporters Without Borders’ press freedom index in 2002, Malaysia and Singapore have had on average significantly lower rankings than their Southeast Asian neighbours (Table 1.1), hovering in the lower quartile. An exception for Malaysia was between 2004 and 2006, when Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who briefly took over as Prime Minister, relaxed his control over the media (Pandian, Omar, & Mohd Sani, 2010). However, this was quickly retightened by Najib Razak, who ousted him and has remained in power until the time of writing. Figure 1.1 illustrates the

⁴ In Malaysia, due to its political structure of 13 semi-autonomous states under a Federal government, the opposition was able to capture power in certain states but never the federal administration.

⁵ Zimbabwe, although sharing a close political relationship with Malaysia and Singapore democracies, is not within the scope of this thesis and will not be discussed further.

performance trend of these five countries in terms of their press freedom in comparison to the 183 countries surveyed worldwide.

Year	Malaysia	Singapore	Indonesia	Thailand	Philippines
2002	110	Not rated	57	65	89
2003	145	149	139	135	147
2004	122	147	117	59	111
2005	113	140	102	107	139
2006	92	146	103	122	142
2007	124	141	100	135	128
2008	132	144	111	124	139
2009	131	133	100	130	122
2010	141	136	117	153	156
2011	122	135	146	137	140
Average	123.2	141	103	110	122

Table 1.1: Press Freedom Ranking of 5 Southeast Asian countries among 183 countries surveyed worldwide, 2002-2011

("World Press Freedom Index Index," 2011).

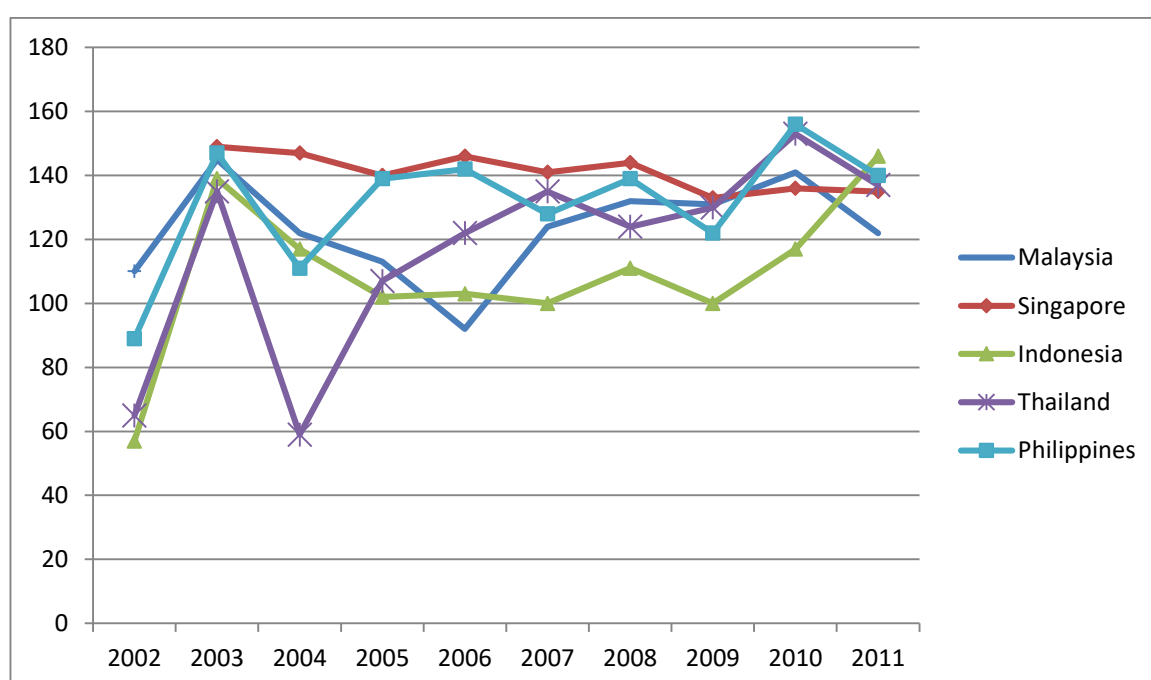


Figure 1.1: Press Freedom Ranking Trends of 5 Southeast Asian countries, 2002-2011

1.3.1 Control over Public Discourse

Former Malaysia Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, a political strongman for 22 years, argued that “[f]reedom ... cannot be used as a weapon to pressure the government because when the government is under pressure all the time, it cannot make good decisions” (“Freedom of assembly should have limits, says Dr Mahathir,” 2012). The governments of both Malaysia and Singapore, despite their fundamentally different ideologies, hold strong to this belief in control over public discourse so as to function effectively and this has been achieved chiefly by controlling access to the mass media and public spaces, and secondly, through surveillance and control over the content of the discourses in these areas.

1.3.1.1 Public Assembly

In Singapore, access to public assembly is limited by two separate acts, namely the Public Entertainments and Meetings Act (“Public Entertainments and Meetings Act,” 1958) and the Public Order Act (“Public Order Act,” 2009). Under the former, a Licensing Officer appointed by the Minister has broad discretionary power to refuse issuance or renewal of a license for a performance if there is a “cause or is likely to be the cause of a breach of the peace” (para. 14a). If a performance is deemed “contrary to the public interest”, he may do likewise (para. 14d). In addition, he has the power to arrest without warrant those who contravene the act. The Public Order Act (2009) was later introduced to supplement his power to control any gathering for the purpose of demonstrating “support for or opposition to the views or actions of any person, group of persons or any government; to publicise a cause or campaign; or to mark or commemorate any event, and includes a demonstration by a person alone for any such purpose referred” (para. 2). These two Acts were immensely successful in creating a climate of fear to discourage people from gathering freely to exchange views on social and political issues in Singapore. In 2000, the designation of Hong Lim Park as an officially sanctioned “speaker’s corner” signalled an apparent relaxation of the rules. A subsequent amendment to the Public Entertainments Act allowed the holding of events without the need for a licence, although the organisers are still required to register with the police and certain restrictions over the content still apply.

In neighbouring Malaysia, although Article 10 of the Constitution guarantees every citizen “the right to freedom of speech and expression...the right to assemble peaceably and without arms [and]... the right to form associations”, Clauses (2), (3) and (4) grant Parliament the power to impose by law certain restrictions involving national security, public order, and the protection of the privileges of Parliament or Legislative Assemblies. To apply these provisions, three Acts were passed to cover sedition, printing, publication and internal security (“The Internal Security Act”, 1960; *Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984*, 2006; “The Sedition Act,” 1948). Subsequently, a newer act was introduced to cover newer media technologies (*Multimedia and Communication Act 1998*). All were frequently invoked to curb free public discourse, especially those that are critical of the government.

1.3.1.2 *Print*

Singapore’s Newspaper and Printing Presses Act in 1974, which regulates access by way of licensing the use of printing presses, pre-dates Malaysia’s Printing Presses and Publication Act (1984). This Act details provisions for the control of the ownership of newspapers, including restrictions on receiving funds from foreign sources. In 1984, through the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (*Newspaper and Printing Presses Act 1974*), the Singapore government consolidated its control over the print media industry by incorporating the Singapore Press Holdings Ltd (SPH) to serve as an umbrella body overseeing 18 newspapers in English, Tamil, Mandarin and Malay, as well as numerous magazines. Members of SPH’s board of directors have close links to the government (“Board of Directors,” 2012a) and past Executive Chairmen include S.R. Nathan (1982-1988), who was a former Director of the Security and Intelligence Division and subsequently the President of Singapore (1994-2002). Another was Tony Tan, former Deputy Prime Minister (1994-2005) and current President of Singapore. Former editor-in-chief of the Straits Times group, Cheong Yip Seng revealed in his memoir that during his tenure a “government team of officials” (GTO) was deployed to the newsroom to monitor the contents (Y. S. Cheong, 2013).

Control over what gets printed is also achieved through a sophisticated use of the courts, and members of the opposition Singapore Democratic Party, and publications such as the *Far East Economic Review*, *Bloomberg News*, the *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *Time Magazine*, and the *International*

Herald Tribune, have all lost defamation lawsuits brought against them by the government. Human Rights Watch reported that “[u]nder Singapore's law, plaintiffs do not carry the burden of proof and there is no latitude for defendants who write on matters of public interest or concerning public officials. Singapore's Court of Appeal has consistently rejected a responsible journalism defense” (“Singapore UPR Submission,” 2010, para 11). A more recent high profile case involved Alan Shadrake, author of *Once a Jolly Hangman*, who was jailed for contempt of court because he criticised the judicial system, even though his book was not banned (Barkham, 2011).

Without the benefit of a compact geography like Singapore, the larger land area, as well as the separation of West and East Malaysia by the South China Sea creates complications for the Malaysian government to cast a comprehensive net over the numerous national and regional newspapers. In 2003, several major national papers were integrated under a publicly listed company, Media Prima Berhad, which now owns The New Straits Times Press (NSTP) that publishes the *New Straits Times* (English broadsheet), *Berita Harian* (Malay broadsheet) and *Harian Metro* (Malay tabloid). This move has effectively secured control over the major segments of the Malay market and a large portion of the English market (“The New Straits Times Press,” 2012). Malay speakers make up 63.1 per cent of the total electorate of 28.3 million. They are mostly rural-based and strategically, any party that commands their attention will enjoy an advantage in an election (“Department of Statistics, Malaysia Official Website” 2011). Media Prima’s substantial shareholders are the government statutory board (Employees Provident Fund Board), which owns 18.46 per cent of the shares, Gabungan Kesturi Sdn Bhd (11.49 per cent) and Altima Inc. (8.25 per cent). Gabungan Kesturi in turn is owned by United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), the biggest and most powerful component party of the Barisan Nasional, the ruling alliance (Shanmugam, 2009; Thomas & Nain, 2004). In addition, UMNO also controls *Utusan Malaysia*, a major national Malay paper infamous for its attacks against opposition leaders, and persistent in doing so despite losing repeated major libel lawsuits against it. In one of the many hearings, the High Court was told that UMNO owns a 49.77 per cent stake in *Utusan Malaysia* (I. Lim, 2012).

With the main component party of the government commanding the Malay circulation, it was left to the Malaysia Chinese Association (MCA), the second largest party of the Barisan Nasional to corner the English and Chinese segments, the remaining crucial electorates based primarily in urban centres. Star Publication, which held the largest circulation for English newspapers and allied publications, was fully acquired by MCA in 2010 ("MCA buys 42% stake in Star for RM1.28bil," 2010). The acquisition of *The Star* was significant as it was the most vociferous English critic of the Mahathir Mohammad administration, which was averse to criticism. The neutralisation of *The Star* was especially poignant as it was a paper closely associated with Mahathir's powerful critic and former political nemesis, Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister who was forced out of office by a faction within UMNO that Mahathir was a part of when he was still a young politician (Wain, 2009, pp. 25-26). Earlier, in 2001, the MCA had also, through its investment arm Huaren Holdings, bought over 72.3 per cent of shares belonging to the fiercely independent Chinese language Nanyang Press ("MCA's Huaren Holdings sells stakes in MCIL," 2010). Bernama, the national news agency is yet another official mouthpiece of the Malaysian government. Set up by an Act of Parliament in 1967, the statutory body began operations in 1968 ("About Bernama," 2013). Collectively, these newspapers and the news agency effectively dominate the mainstream print media market, and essentially have a stranglehold over both their access and content.

1.3.1.3 Broadcast

Amateur enthusiasts introduced radio broadcasting to Singapore at the beginning of the 20th century (A. L. Chua, 2012). Similar private activities took place in the states of Johor, Penang and Kuala Lumpur ("Background," 2012). Licensing was introduced only subsequently as a means to fund the radio stations and licenses were easily obtained, as evidenced by the "353 licences issued in 1933" (A. L. Chua, 2012, p. 181). However, by the 1930s, policymakers had embarked on a plan to monopolise broadcasting across the Malaysian (then known as the Malayan) peninsula through the formation of the British Malaya Broadcasting Corporation, a quasi-government body managed jointly by the Straits Settlements government and the United Kingdom. The colonial government subsequently bought it over completely in anticipation of the 2nd World War, to serve as a war propaganda medium targeting

beyond the Malayan shores. When Singapore fell to Japan, the occupiers quickly reversed its propaganda function in their own favour. After the war, Radio Malaya, Singapore and the Federation of Malaya served the entire region until the spilt between Malaya and Singapore, which saw the formation of Radio Singapore (1959) as a separate entity from Radio Malaya. From this time until Singapore's independence from the new Malaysia, both the ruling party and opposition had equal access to the air ("Mediacorp: Interactive History," 2013).

In 1963, both radio stations in Singapore and Malaysia incorporated television into their operations in February and December respectively. The Malaysian radio-television station has remained as an agency under the Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture to this very day, while the broadcasting station in Singapore went through several restructuring phases, firstly, as Radio and Television Singapore (RTS) under the Ministry of Culture, then the more autonomous Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) in 1980 (Switching to SBC, "Mediacorp: Interactive History," 2013) and eventually privatised as Television Corporation of Singapore (TCS) in 1994. A 1999 corporate restructuring absorbed it into the present day giant MediaCorp, which had also taken control of the SPH print media and a host of other media content production companies (TCS to MediaCorp "Mediacorp: Interactive History," 2013). While these changes provided greater freedom and independence in terms of its corporate management, personnel and commercial decisions, structures remained in place for content control by the government, for example, the appointments of government-linked personnel to sit on the Board of Directors. Present Chairman of the MediaCorp Board of Directors, Teo Ming Kian, has previously held numerous positions as permanent secretary for various ministries, most notable of all being the Ministry of Communications (1995) under which jurisdiction the Media Development Authority (MDA) falls ("Mr Teo Ming Kian retires as permanent secretary for National Research and Development," 2011). This was not disclosed in the official curriculum vitae retrieved from the Ministry of Law archive ("Mr Teo Ming Kian retires as permanent secretary for National Research and Development," 2011). The MDA was formed in 2003 to replace the Singapore Broadcasting Authority, the Films and Publications Department and the Singapore Film

Commission, and tasked to carry out the formulation and enforcement of regulations relating to all forms of mass media as well as licensing ("Overview," 2011).

Across the Causeway, in 1984 Malaysia saw the debut of its first private commercial free-to-air television station, TV3, which promised independent programming. TV3 later branched out into the pay-TV market, but maintained at least 32 per cent of television viewership, giving the government-owned RTM stiff competition. However, TV3 too was subsequently appropriated by Media Prima, the same owner of the NSTP group, and lost its short-lived independence (*Media Prima: Business*, 2010). The same fate befell other newer independent channels (8TV, TV9 and ntv7), as well as a number of radio stations (Fly FM, Hot FM and One FM).

Malaysia launched its first satellite broadcast in 1996. Astro Malaysia Holdings Berhad continues to monopolise pay television until today and has a customer base of 3 million. It did not remain as a commercial and private telecommunication company of tycoon Ananda Krishnan for long. First, the national news agency, Bernama, took over Astro's news channel. Subsequently, Bernama became the co-producer of the Astro news. In 2008, a 24-hour news channel called Bernama TV began transmission through Astro (BERNAMA Services "About Bernama," 2013) and finally, in 2010, Khazanah Nasional Berhad, the investment holding arm of the government, bought the entire company (Jason Ng, 2012).

1.3.2 Tension – economics versus control

In both countries, there is a distinct pattern of the governments attempting to move away from the image of authoritarianism in favour of greater economic considerations, while at the same time retaining a desire to control public discourse, albeit less overtly. Singapore handed over much of the operations of the mainstream media to carefully selected operators with trusted links to the corridors of power. This ensured a continued hegemony over the access and contents of the media, while freeing the media institutions to be more economically profitable. The situation in Malaysia was less straightforward as the government had had to deal at the onset with a generally more independent,

privately-owned mainstream media and the government's only means of control over the media, at least initially, was through limiting access by selectively granting licenses or imposing strict conditions for circulation, as in the case of opposition party newspapers. More established institutions like the Chinese newspapers had to be brought under control by subtle means to avoid severe repercussion from the loyal and economically influential communities that backed the newspapers. The government had limited success in taking a hard stance against them, and then, only under very special circumstances, for instance, during the 1987 Operation Lalang, a massive crackdown using the Internal Security Act, which provided a convenient excuse to permanently close down *Watan*, a Malay paper critical of the government. For the most part, the Malaysian government maintained an uneasy relationship with critical voices until they successfully out-manoeuvred the contentious media organisations through the corporate coup d'état that gave the government full legal control over them. Even then the option of suspending publication licences of noncompliant papers remains a powerful option for the government, with *The Edge Weekly* and *The Edge Financial Daily*, a business-focused newspaper group being the latest to have its permits suspended for exposing the major financial scandal, 1MDB, implicating the Prime Minister (Shukry, 2015).

1.4 The Internet

The Internet arrived in Malaysia and Singapore in the middle of the 1990s. The Singapore government's initial foray into cyberspace was tentative, starting with a small test project within the National University of Singapore. The successful test led to a comprehensive embrace of the technology. After just several months of its official introduction, the entire government and all their agencies were connected to pave the way for the wiring of the whole nation. This sudden and rapid deployment of the Internet was driven by the belief that the new technology would bring about vast potential benefits for the country, particularly in the R&D sector that Singapore was cultivating at that time, although there were other areas of general commercial applications as well. Singapore quickly recognised it as a critical component for the country to stay competitive and relevant in the nascent Information Age. To realise this vision, the government released a set of policies and guidelines that guaranteed easy access to all Singaporeans and uncurbed freedom of speech with no censorship, but

with the proviso that participants be accountable for their words and actions (Quah, 2002, para. 20-25). This unprecedented and bold move away from traditional control through regulated access and content did not endure. Within a year, new rules based on the two principles of restricting access and increasing surveillance were introduced when it became evident the old procedures did not adapt well to the new and unknown cyber world (Aguilar, 1996). Restricting users' access to the Internet or the hardware would have been counter-productive and would have negated the very benefits the government wanted the Internet to bring. Restricting access to unapproved sites proved difficult due to the sheer number of sites that would fall under the government's broad definition of objectionable. Users could also easily bypass the restrictions by using proxy sites, and banned sites could re-emerge in mirror sites. Effective censorship was not possible without a corresponding negative impact on the diffusion of the technology as well as the desired productive and positive result that brought about the need for the Internet in the first place. When the government drew up a list of one hundred objectionable websites to be "symbolically" banned, it was widely interpreted as an implicit concession of defeat (M. Lee, 2008). The surveillance of the users, another standard practice in the past, although technically possible, was similarly impractical due to the tremendous cost it would incur in terms of the technology needed to be deployed, as well as the manpower required to manage the sheer number of users and the enormous amount of data flowing through the net (Ang & Nadarajan, 1995, p. 24).

In Malaysia the then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad also embraced the Internet with great enthusiasm as it was to be the engine to advance the nation along his ambitious Vision 2020 roadmap, to become "a fully developed, matured and knowledge-rich society by year 2020" ("What is MSC?," n.d.). The plan includes the setting up of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) to mirror Silicon Valley, and came with a Bill of Guarantees promising a slew of extraordinary liberties and incentives, including no censorship of the Internet, to entice investors ("MSC Malaysia Bill of Guarantees ", n.d.).

The need for new ways to regulate the use became evident as the world came to realise the power of the Internet for both good and harm. A report commissioned by the European Union listed the following areas that were of legitimate concern:

- national security (instructions on bomb-making, illegal drug production, terrorist activities);
- protection of minors (abusive forms of marketing, violence, pornography);
- protection of human dignity (incitement to racial hatred or racial discrimination);
- economic security (fraud, instructions on pirating credit cards);
- information security (malicious hacking);
- protection of privacy (unauthorized communication of personal data, electronic harassment);
- protection of reputation (libel, unlawful comparative advertising);
- intellectual property (unauthorized distribution of copyrighted works, software or music)

(Telecommunications Council, 1999, para. 7)

Both Malaysia and Singapore were initially confident that existing laws were sufficient to deal with any situations that might arise. The test for Singapore came when in 2001, Tan Chong Kee, the founder of Sintercom, an online platform for discussing national issues in Singapore, was asked to register the website as a political site under the new Singapore Broadcasting Authority just before the general election (Ellis, 2001). This was a clear attempt to control access by the community formed around Sintercom and Tan to the new online public space, as well as an indirect influence over the contents of the discussions, which touched but was not focused exclusively on politics. Tan chose to give up the site rather than bow to the pressure to register. Had he done so he would have been held liable for all contents appearing on the site. Since Sintercom, the government has more or less kept to its promise and any action taken against Internet users has mostly been in line with the EU recommendations above, although there is debate whether the implementation has been too harshly applied. The arrest of a 13-year-old foreign student who made a bomb threat on Facebook in 2013 elicited mixed responses from the international media, and illustrates the difficulty the government faces in making a judgment (AAP, 2013). When the Minister for Information, Communication and the Arts called upon the online community to develop a code of conduct, it was seen by some as a sign of the authorities' continued discomfort with the new and unprecedented level of freedom of expression

being exercised by Singaporeans (N. Lim, 2012; A. Loh, 2013). To reach out to them, the Prime Minister invited 18 prominent bloggers and netizens to his official residence for tea where he expressed his concerns about some of the activities online (A. Loh, 2012; "PM Lee meets bloggers, netizens for tea at Istana," 2012). During his National Day Rally speech in 2008 the Prime Minister outlined the government's promise to approach Internet regulation with a "light touch", an approach which was formalised in the 2011 Internet Regulatory Framework ("Internet Regulatory Framework," 2011; "Transcript of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally 2008 Speech at NUS-UCC On 17 August 2008," 2010, para 73-78). Critics however point to several notable incidents that showed the government's actions prove otherwise. For instance, the Board of Film Censors had refused to classify *One Nation Under Lee* by artist and activist Seelan Palay, which contains an excerpt of Zahari's *17 Years*, a banned political video of an interview with Said Zahari, one-time editor-in-chief of Singapore's *Utusan Melayu* newspaper and who was held for 17 years without trial. Oddly, it was nonetheless declared a criminal offence to possess a copy of it (See, 2009). More recently the government appears to have hardened its stance when the editors of the socio-political website, The Real Singapore, were charged with sedition (C. Tan, 2015). Blogger Roy Ngerng, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, wrote extensively to question the government's management of state pension funds. He was sued by the Prime Minister for defamation (Wong, 2014). Similarly, 16-year-old video personality and former child actor Amos Yee, who uploaded on YouTube a video rant criticising Singapore's first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew shortly after his death, was arrested and charged for "insulting Christianity and the late statesman, and...of allegedly transmitting online an 'obscene representation'" (Abernethy, 2015), earning him Amnesty International's recognition as a prisoner of conscience (Amnesty International, 2015b).

In the early days, Malaysia had been less upfront about how it intended to deal with issues that may arise, choosing only to reiterate that there would be no censorship of the Internet. The real test of their commitment to keeping that promise came when Raja Petra Kammarudin (a prominent blogger), Tan Hoon Cheng (a Chinese mainstream newspaper journalist), and Teresa Kok (an opposition MP), were all arrested under the Internal Security Act, which allows for detentions without trial for anyone who

is “allegedly being a threat to security, peace and public order” (“Raja Petra, Teresa Kok and Sin Chew reporter arrested under ISA,” 2008). It was determined later that the journalist merely reported a highly inflammatory and racist remark by UMNO’s own division chief during a by-election, whilst Kok was arrested “over a religious matter concerning a mosque” which again was instigated by UMNO supporters (“Teresa Kok, Sin Chew reporter arrested under ISA,” 2008). The Home Minister who ordered the arrests, in an apparent realisation that this was a mistake, particularly Tan’s arrest, attempted to reverse his decision by announcing that her arrest “under the Internal Security Act (ISA) [was] because her life was under threat” (Looi, 2008). This earned him ridicule from various quarters and even a public rebuke by a cabinet colleague. Since this attempt to crackdown on dissenters, a number of other arrests of bloggers and critics of the government have also been made (Associated Press, 2011). Prime Minister Najib Razak, continued to repeat the government’s promise of no censorship (Chooi, 2011), yet, a year later two amendments were made to the Malaysian Evidence Act 1950 to deal with “allegedly illicit or harmful content on the Internet”, which effectively shifted the burden of proof to the accused (Libre, 2012; “Malaysia: Blackout Protest Against Internet Censorship Legislation,” 2012). The contradiction between the Malaysian government’s declared policies and its actions suggests either a lack of coherent thinking within the government in the implementation of its policies, or conflict between factions struggling with various political considerations involving power play. Like Singapore, the Malaysian government too had hardened its position against critics by employing oblique ways to silence online criticisms. A catalyst for this change of tack in both governments is the introduction of Web 2.0, a term coined by Darcy DiNucci to describe the new user interactivity technology, which spawned social media. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, among other social media, played critical roles in the General Elections of Singapore in 2011 and Malaysian in 2013 (T. Chong, 2011; Gomez, 2014). The use of social media to critique the ruling regimes did not abate after the elections. In fact, they opened up new public spaces that impelled the anxious authorities to explore new ways to curb their progression (“Govt’s requests for data of Facebook accounts on the rise,” 2015; J. Y. Ng, 2015; Palatino, 2014a).

1.5 Finding humour within this socio-political context

In Singapore, prior to the Internet, political humour was mostly muted and shared only in private as the government officially frowns upon political satire, which it deems as “disrespectful” and undermining of the authority of the leaders (De Clercq, 2006). Editorial cartoons were regularly featured in *The Straits Times* since British rule, but stopped after the People’s Action Party (PAP) took over, resurfacing only in 1979, but in a much milder form, as cartoonists were encouraged to self-censor (Tju, 2000, p. 78). Humour targeting local politicians would never be accepted for publication although cartoons on foreign events were encouraged. Use of political humour in the performing arts was fairly tolerated as it was confined to a small audience and so long as they remained within the out-of-bounds (OB) markers, comedians generally escape retributive action (Bland, 2009). The “OB markers” was a concept formulated during the time of Singapore’s second Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, as a result of what is now known as “the Catherine Lim affair” when Lim, Singapore’s most well-known fiction writer, had a public altercation with Prime Minister Goh (T. Lee, 2002; C. Lim, 2009). Since then the markers have been gradually expanded and clarified by the government, although critics maintained that they are vague and inconsistent (“Minister Yeo on OB markers and Internet,” 1999).

In 2005, ex-journalist Lee Kin Mun, often referred to as Singapore’s blogfather, produced the immensely popular mrbrown show, Singapore’s first political satire podcast (Leow, 2012). The then newly appointed Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong demonstrated a more accepting attitude towards such humour and he even described the mrbrown show as “hilarious” in the 2006 National Day Rally speech (the mrbrown show, 2006). Prime Minister Lee appeared eager to signal his administration’s tolerance and even appreciation for humour and often made jokes in his own speeches. He created a minor stir in international news when during a businessmen’s dinner address in the United States he cracked jokes targeting China (Pennington, 2013). Political humour has flourished in recent years on the Internet, some highly critical of politicians and government policies, but mostly by amateur individuals. With the exception of the arrest of cartoonist Leslie Chew for allegedly committing contempt of court, the humourists are largely not harassed (Wong, 2013).

In Malaysia, a lack of reliable records has resulted in scarce knowledge about humourists and cartoonists in pre-Independence newspapers. In the post-Independence era, the lack of information about cartoonists who dealt with socio-political issues was due to a slightly different reason. Lent (1999) highlighted the worries cartoonists experience “that they might suffer for their clever artistry” and many chose either not to sign their work or to remain hidden behind pen names to keep a low profile. Arguably, the most famous socio-political cartoonist post-Independence was Mohammad Nor Khalid, more popularly known as Lat (Thomson Gale, 2009). As the *New Straits Times* editorial cartoonist, he effectively captured in his commissioned series, “Scenes of Malaysian Life”, situations that ordinary Malaysian readers across various ethnic groups could easily identify with. With his self-deprecating depictions of his own growing-up years in a rural Malay village, the love story of fictitious Indian couple Vellapan and Minachi in courtship and the Chinese wedding of Hakka lovers, Kow Chai and Yin Moi gently poked fun at the idiosyncratic cultural practices of the different races. Instead of causing offence, his work endeared him to Malaysians of all walks of life for acknowledging, recognising and understanding the plural communities in his work. The cartoons were subsequently compiled into several books, beginning with the first volume *Kampung Boy* (Lat, 1979). That his gentle comedy of the foibles of ordinary Malaysians, the government, and even the normally feared Prime Minister Mahathir, did not invite negative repercussions attests to his skill and sensitivity in negotiating around taboo subjects in Malaysia like race and politics.

The Internet spurred the birth of the independent online newspaper but not all withstood the challenges of funding and staffing. One that did and was able to seize a sizeable market segment from print was Malaysiakini, the first commercial online newspaper that came into being as an indirect result of the first political persecution of former Deputy Prime Minister and de facto Opposition Leader, Anwar Ibrahim (Malaysiakini, 2015). Malaysiakini has since grown sufficiently strong to have Zulkiflee Anwar Haque as its in-house cartoonist. Zunar, the pen name he goes by, represents a new generation of cartoonists who share the belief that “[i]t is the responsibility of the cartoonist to highlight oppression. So, [his] cartoons are directed towards fighting the tyranny and corruption, of the government of Malaysia” (Zunar, 2015). His bold stance led to his detention, together with other

activists, under the Sedition Act, and also the banning of his book *I Funny Malaysia*, in 2010 (Yean, 2011). Zunar stands out not just as a fighter against corruption but also as challenger of the authorities' attempt to silence critics like him. He subsequently took legal action against the government (Dietz, 2012) and although his civil lawsuit was not successful at challenging his arrest, he won a moral victory when the Malaysian court ruled that the seizing of his cartoons was not lawful (Gardner, 2012). Human Rights Watch described the court's ruling as a setback to Malaysians' "right to freedom of expression in the country" (HRW, 2012).

1.6 Conclusion

In my assessment of the socio-political terrain in Malaysia and Singapore, I observed that, while the citizens have traded their freedom of expression for peace and prosperity, the Internet, particularly Web 2.0, opened a Pandora box of sorts, because citizens were increasingly aware of alternative narratives to government sanctioned versions that they (and I) grew up with, where things taken for granted were gradually exposed as myths. Increasingly, a social media culture is taking root where users may feel compelled to respond to things being posted, post or share things of their own with their online social circle or repost items they receive. Used to a culture of fear that led to our ideas and opinions being kept to ourselves, I am observing my society tentatively expressing and asserting themselves, even when their views are contrary to political orthodoxy. Social media appear to allow users to circumvent traditional restrictions. My primary curiosity now lies in how this is done, especially with respect to the use of citizen satire. It is not the aim of this thesis to study the nature of humour but how it is used and why it is chosen as the medium for communication. It is also of interest to observe the reactions of the governments of both countries who tried to liberalise regulation over the Internet. The increasingly vocal opposition online has clearly caused them much discomfort and there are signs the authorities are attempting to tighten regulations. However, this may be akin to closing the proverbial stable door after the horses have bolted. The citizens who have gained a new perspective of the world can no longer fit into the old system that was so easily controlled through the highly restricted and regulated media.

Taking this thesis forward, the next chapter will be a literature review of the knowledge that is already in existence pertaining to the Internet in politics, the Internet meme, and political humour. In the case of the latter, a closer look at what is the essence of humour, the utility of political humour, and how political humour has been used online will be necessary. In the 3rd chapter the methodology and methods will be discussed and I will argue the case for using online ethnography as the primary approach as it provides deep insight into the meaning of the cultural practices surrounding the use of humour. I will also lay out the justification for the use of multiple sites for this study to show the connection between how humour is used by these different sites and how the communities engage in politics. A discussion on how I intend to calibrate the ethnographic instrument, namely me as the researcher, will follow before the four case studies are presented. Each case study will highlight a certain aspect of the use of humour in the political online spaces of the two countries under study. The first case study is largely exploratory and establishes that citizens using memes to express their dissenting views is a new media phenomenon that is worthy of scholarly attention. The second develops a method for sampling the data by using Anderson's (2012) media compass metaphor, pointing to the properties, processes, consequences and character, and demonstrates the wide range of data available for closer study. The third case study expands on one particular media compass point, the process of producing a meme for rhetorical purposes, and explores some analytical tools that have been adapted from political cartoon studies. In doing so, I develop and pursue the idea that the political Internet meme could be a remediated form of the political cartoon. The final chapter looks at the dynamics surrounding the use of a satirical video by Teresa Kok, an opposition politician, and explores why as a parliamentarian with access to a legitimate state platform she would cross over to the entertainment domain to voice her opinion. Her use of satire contrasts with the humour used by ordinary citizens in the first three case studies. A final discussion of the major findings outlines the contribution this study makes to knowledge.

2 Literature Review

This chapter will attempt to verify some of these initial discoveries against documented knowledge, starting with an overview of the mediascape since the Internet, followed by a brief genealogy of political humour to position this study within the existing literature on how political humour is used. This is then followed by a review of the classical theories of humour that will provide a basis for understanding the mechanics of how the humour in the case studies of this thesis is produced and how it might be understood. Finally, there will be an assessment of how political humour has been used as a passive subversion tool through the media. Following that, this chapter discusses how humour has been used actively in relation to protest and social movements in order to discover antecedents and parallels for my case studies. By taking the literature review through these stages, I am applying Swedberg's (2012, p. 14) rules of theorising, that is to name, conceptualise, and to employ "analogies, metaphors, and types" in order to find meaningful patterns that help us understand better how humour is used by the citizens of these two countries.

2.1 The Internet in politics

My observation of online politics in Malaysia and Singapore, up to this stage, is very much in sync with Jenkins' (HCDMediaGroup, 2009) characterisation of the present mediascape as in "a moment of transition, a moment where the old media system is dying and the new is being born" (00:23). His convergence theory suggests that the Internet is not just another new medium but an entirely new system that is colliding with the old "where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2).

This participatory culture, which lies at the heart of this citizen satire study, has predictably raised questions about the implications of the change and the kind of impact it has on a host of areas in society, like health, sexuality, morality and of course, politics (L. A. Jackson et al., 2004; Manning, 2006; Murray et al., 2003; Nie & Hillygus, 2002; Valcke, Bonte, De Wever, & Rots, 2010). In order to make

sense of the questions that arise from these considerations, it is tempting to oversimplify the issues by dividing matters into a clear dichotomy of good and bad.

This communication technology utopia/dystopia conflict dates as far back as Plato who invoked the Egyptian myth of Theuth to illustrate the merits and demerits of the new invention of writing (Roth, 2009). Since then views on every technological innovation have been split by this binary of optimism and pessimism: the printing press, the telegraph, television and of course now, the Internet. Early research by van de Donk et al., (1995) noted two extreme positions that dominated debate about the Internet and its political role. The “Athens” position, after the Athenian model of democracy, argues for “decentralization, transparency, interactiveness and freedom of information” (p.5). One moment widely regarded as defining for the Internet as a political tool and a force for democratic change was the 2004 Orange Revolution in the Ukraine, when Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube were seen as the democratising agents that aided the prodemocracy protests” (Faris & Etling, 2008 p. 65). Samuels (2011) argues that “[t]hese bottom-up social movements begin without a set agenda or organizational hierarchy; instead, new media social movements combine technology with spontaneity, offering a new way of interacting with the world” (para.7).

In politics, utopians tend to view the Internet as a medium that can potentially increase political participation of the masses, a facet essential for good democracy (Lerman, 2007; Macintosh, 2004; Nov, Naaman, & Ye, 2010; Sanford & Rose, 2007). A healthy, working democracy is predicated on well-informed and rational citizens actively involved in the decision making of their government. Participation can be understood as either being involved in communal discussion, or being involved in some decision-making process, either formally, as in elections, or informally, as in activism (Sanford & Rose, 2007, p. 407). Not all are convinced that the average citizen possesses the ability to play this role responsibly. In Singapore, the first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, had declared in a 1960 radio interview before he gained power that “[i]f I were in authority in Singapore indefinitely without having to ask those who are governed whether they like what is being done, then I have not the slightest doubt that I could govern much more effectively in their interests” (Kingsbury, 2001, p. 337). Across the Causeway former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed had stated on record that “[i]t is the

good life that democracy brings that counts, not democracy per se" (Francis, 2002). The result of this scepticism is a variety of democratic doctrines ranging from representational forms, where the electorate picks someone more competent than themselves to make decisions on their behalf, to direct participatory forms where the electorate have a direct say in crucial decisions (Carpentier, 2011, p. 16). A primary site of this contest is the media (Breindl & Francq, 2008, pp. 25-26). For citizens to make responsible informed decisions, they must have access to reliable and accurate information, as well as a platform to debate and deliberate their option collectively. The media, especially the Internet, is seen as having great potential to facilitate this process through three roles: as a communication medium, a source of information and as a virtual public sphere (Polat, 2005).

Pessimists on the other hand fear the "informatisation" of society, and are concerned for the rise of an Orwellian state, where citizens' fundamental rights are violated or deprived (van de Donk et al., 1995), a concern underscored by the National Security Agency (NSA) leak by former US CIA-personnel, Edward Snowden (Rodriquez, 2013). They also fear that instead of liberalising people the Internet strengthens the control of autocratic regimes over their citizens. To the pessimist, those who engage in "slacktivism" are indulging in at best a mistaken idea and at worst an illusion that clicking a "like" or "share" button is real activism (Morozov, 2012). Shifman, Coleman and Ward (2007) found that humour has been used "instrumentally" to "promote political participation" (p.482) by adopting a "post-modernist, metaphoric framework of game-playing", which although neither technological pessimistic or dystopic, is nevertheless a rather cynical view that politics are games or cool and fun.

In brief, a simplistic, stark take on the impact of technology is a weak position as the empirical evidence has strongly demonstrated that the impact on society is generally nuanced and for this reason this study rejects a deterministic, zero-sum dichotomous approach. For example, Theocharis and Quintelier (2014) pointed out that although young people's participation in politics is in decline, this is observed mainly in institutionalised politics. The extensive discussion of these two positions on technology as good/bad is solely for establishing the extreme poles that will allow me to locate the current debates on a continuum between them.

2.2 The Internet meme

In their study of YouTubers as satirists, da Silva & Garcia (2012) traced the “genealogy of political satire from classical to Internet times” (p.89) and showed that the dominant form of political humour evolved from one age to another depending on the available technology of the day. For example, it was satire in the 18th century, political cartoons in the 19th, political quiz shows and other broadcasting during the 20th and the Internet meme in the 21st century. This evolution of how humour has been viewed and studied through the ages helps position the Internet meme within a cultural-historical context.

The starting point of this study shall be the Internet meme, an idea borrowed from evolutionary biology (Dawkins, 1976) where hypothetical cultural units are transmitted through replication in a Darwinian selection fashion, similar to the propagation of biological genes. Aunger (2002) postulated an interesting but controversial notion of a physical thought-gene situated in the brain that exploits artefacts like books, CDs, and billboards to store messages. Atran (2001, p. 353) argued that the very idea of memes itself is a highly contestable notion, as a scientific analogy between genes and memes must be testable to be “informatively sustained” and memes may be more useful as a mere “pedagogic device”. Shifman and Thelwall (2009, pp. 2568-2569) argued that because of the digital nature of the Internet, Dawkin’s three properties required for replication (copy-fidelity, fecundity and longevity) allows for “Web Memetics”, which is the practical method of monitoring the digital trail of memes.

Though the Dawkinsian meme (see 2.2 The Internet meme) was originally defined as a cultural replicator in the forms of “tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches” (Dawkins, 1976, p. 192), since its appropriation by Internet culture, memes have taken on a colloquial meaning and could now refer to a Tweet or Facebook entry (Mustafaraj & Metaxas, 2011; Reuter & Szakonyi, 2013), a YouTube video (Silva & Garcia, 2012) or even pictures of “cute cats” (Zuckerman, 2014). More commonly, however, memes now refer to static images, for example image-macros, which are pictures with text superimposed on them, usually for humorous effect (Vickery, 2014). Retrospectively, I too, have adopted the latter familiar usage of the word meme in the previous case studies. For these reasons social scientists researching online memetics have found it more expedient to avoid the disputes about the validity of the meme notion and to focus instead on

memes as an abstract philosophical analogy that operationalises these digital cultural units simply as the anecdotes, audio and video clips and pictures found on the Internet.

The development of online social media has precipitated a slew of research efforts on how memes proliferate, the social-political dynamics they generate and the kinds of topical patterns and trends that materialise as a result (Colbaugh & Glass, 2011). Virality studies (Guadagno, Rempala, Murphy, & Okdie, 2013), prediction of news cycles (Leskovec, Backstrom, & Kleinberg, 2009), and the social media's competition for users' attention are staple research foci at the time of this research (Weng, Flammini, Vespignani, & Menczer, 2012). However, this study is less concerned with the reproduction of memes as textual objects, the explanation or tracking of Internet memes or how they are reappropriated across networks. Instead its focus is on meme production, the intentions of the producers and their impact in the context of political humour. Burgess (2008) uses "viral marketing" to describe this process surrounding the production and dissemination of such memes, and defines it as "the attempt to exploit the network effects of word-of-mouth and Internet communication in order to induce a massive number of users to pass on marketing messages and brand information voluntarily" (p.1). Burgess also makes an important distinction between marketing and cultural participation: memes are not mere "messages" or "products" but "cultural practices [which are] originated, adopted and retained within social networks" (p.2). The cultural participation will be a major focus of this study. To Burgess, Jenkins' (2007) notion of "spreadable content" (which is content designed to be passed along, as opposed to "sticky content" that pulls consumers to a site) is key for ensuring the content resonates within a culture, takes on new meanings, finds new audiences, attracts new markets or generates new values. It is of interest to this study how political humour is spreadable or sticky.

2.3 Political humour: old as human civilisation

In trying to establish what kind of political humour research has been done by others in the past I traced the earliest records of humour being used for political ends to some of the oldest civilisations where it served a supporting role in the form of some comic relief counterpoint in the background of classical literary, rhetorical and political thinking. Marsot (1971, p. 3) described a bas-relief dating back to the

old kingdom of Pharaonic Egypt 4,000 years ago depicting “the keeper of the sacred baboons being tripped up by one of his charges, and sourly commenting on fate which led him into the company of monkeys”; this has been interpreted as political in nature. Public use of humour was a commonplace technique in ancient Greek and Roman oratory, exemplified by the Aristophanes corpus of comedy, as well as Cicero’s and Quintilian’s works (Bremmer & Roodenburg, 1997; Corbeill, 1996; Evans & Kleijwegt, 2001). Similarly, political humour was found in early Arab and Muslim civilisation, with records dating back to no less than the Prophet himself, who was described as “the most humorous of men”, who approved of forms of humour that are *haqq* or truthful (Kishtainy, 1985, p. 18). In ancient China, Xu (2004) noted that “there was a Confucian vigilance against humour” (p.514), which presents the plausible argument that humour must have been present in the socio-political sphere for the prohibition to be necessary.

In the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution resulted in the concentration of people in urban centres as well as the rise of literacy, which in turn cultivated the demand for reading material, including the newspaper. Cartoons and caricatures soon became part of the newspapers’ arsenal of political commentaries (Halloran, 2013; Long, 1962; Streicher, 1965). The combination of modern media technology and an even broader audience base of literate people saw a more pervasive use of political humour in the media in the 20th century. The 20th century also marked the switch of humour from mostly oral forms to mediated ones as they became ubiquitous in print, radio and film. This switch is significant, as it was now, with technology, possible for humour to be exploited in the socio-political realm to convey competing views and ideologies through a much wider use of satire, caricature, and comedies to make political commentaries. Previously, this was difficult due to limited access to cost effective media forms that can disseminate the witty messages widely and cheaply.

Kessel (2012) argued that against the background of two major wars and much conflict between democratic and authoritarian regimes across the world (for example, the Cold War), humour had provided “an important means to negotiate identity and belonging” through the production of “inclusion and exclusion along the lines of race, ethnicity, and gender” (p.3). Yet, scholars have paid scant attention to political humour. Zijderfeld (1983, p. 1) noted that the neglect is particularly noticeable in sociology,

compared to philosophy, psychology and anthropology, which all include humour and laughter as “almost respectable research topics”. To this list I add the neglect of humour studies in media and communication.

However, in recent times there has been renewed interest in this aspect of research by researchers due in large part to the emergency of the new television genre of political satire that ascended from the deluge of 24/7/365 world information. If one were to be able to cope with the “horror show[s] of disappointments, brutality, dysfunction, stupidity, and greed that plays out daily on video screens and, if rumours are true, newspapers”, a good laugh becomes an indispensable tonic (Marc, 2009, p. ix). US presidents, beginning with President George Bush, became targets of satirical impersonations (Jones (2009). Faux American presidential candidates were promoted on television during election seasons (Osbourne-Thompson, 2009). Jon Stewart’s seminal “fake news” blurred the lines between satire and reality, resulting in the demand for higher critical thinking skills and judgment in order to engage meaningfully in political discourse (Baym, 2009; Morreale, 2009; Day, 2009). In the United Kingdom, comedians Chris Morris and Sacha Baron Cohen’s incorporation of “real interviews” into their comedies pushed the boundaries of political imagery further (Gray, 2009), while satirical comedies in Canada was found to have a unifying effect on a regionally fragmented country, at least in terms of television news consumption (Gray, Jones & Thompson, 2009, p. 30). Scholars like Anolli et al. (2002) try to theorise deceptive forms of communication like these and others, using models, for example DeMiT, (Deceptive Miscommunication Theory) for analysis. Newer humour scholars, like Kuipers (2008) have approached the field a sociologically in order to take advantage of the discipline’s lack of strong boundaries and its contested core where “there is no central framework, theoretical perspective, or methodological approach that all sociologists adhere to” (p. 392), as this affords her to make connections between “small-scale interactions with larger societal developments; cultural conditions with individual amusement; and the social functions of humour with its form and content” (Kuipers, 2008, p. 393). This enabled her to understand the social difference in humour taste, for example why certain jokes funny to some are considered in bad taste to others (Kuiper, 2015). Humour scholarship has also investigated the limits of satire, and humour in general (Lockyer & Pickering, 2006). Their

research shows how comedy finds society's fault lines, drawing boundaries around what is considered permissible. Thompson (2009) finds over-the-top carnevalesque comedies that constantly transgress standards of good taste can, at the same time, remain provocative and meaningful enough to deal with contentious political issues in a timely manner. Investigations of audience reception to successful comedy reveal a deeper understanding of the embedded social critique within comedy is not guaranteed (Haggins, 2009; Santo, 2009). Lockyer (2006) found that combining satirical humour with investigative journalism, while effective in enticing readers and raising questions of importance, fail to answer the crucial questions raised most of the time.

Surveying the scholarship on political humour thus far, Tsakona and Popa (2011, pp. 1-2) observed two common trends: the first is to view it mostly as a subversion tool, with the intention to influence audiences to challenge decisions and policies of political leaders in order to effect political changes, and the second to see humour as being coupled closely and specifically to certain social groups, for example, Jewish humour, Irish humour or dumb blonde jokes. Tsakona and Popa regarded this subversive tradition as mythical because in their view it is also possible for humour to "recycle and reinforce dominant values and views" (p. 2) with the former, whilst for the latter, they argue that it is more important to track the similarities and connections across those communities. Corner (2012), while agreeing with these two arguments, nevertheless rejects their use of the term "myth" as polemically too strong because what they have proposed does not contradict the traditional views, but merely "opens up a more subtle and variable framework of analysis and judgement" (p. 1053) without a need to dispense with the critical function of humour. Similarly, the second "myth" is not displaced by their counter-proposal. Instead, what they have proposed is a mere change of focus away from "specificity and exclusivity" (p. 1054) so as to make connections across various national contexts, for instance. This is an expansion of focus rather than a displacement of one by the other.

2.3.1 The essence of humour

To further understand the use of citizen satire in Malaysia and Singapore, another necessary task is to understand what makes something humorous, so that by extension we can determine where it derives

its cultural and political power. Does humour have a universal essence that transcends national, cultural and social boundaries? In order to answer this in a scholarly manner the object of study would have to be described and categorised through some form of definition so that meaningful measurements and comparisons with like objects can be made. But in doing so one immediately runs into problems with an abstract entity such as humour. As this thesis is not so much concerned with the nature of humour as the use of humour, generic folk terms with fuzzy boundaries are used just as they are understood by the general population throughout the case studies. However, a caveat attached to this outlook is that at the very least a basic common denominator marking these terms is playfulness. Laughter may or may not follow, but the intention of play is essential.

Probably the earliest theorist of humour, Aristotle, used a dual partition approach – defining something by what it is not, which led him to characterise comedy as that which is not a tragedy (Aristotle, 350a BCE). This is not especially helpful. Volkelt (1905) rightly pointed out that the opposite of humour or comedy can also be serious or unfunny. Some researchers use laughter to define something as humorous, but this is easily countered by the argument that laughter can be induced by physical stimuli, for example tickling, or nitrous oxide (laughing gas) (Chen, 2010; Spencer, 1860). Laughter is also a poor signifier of humour, especially when viewed from a cultural perspective. Aubouin (1948, p. 14) and Obbrechts-Tyteca (1974), as cited in Attardo (1994), noted certain cultures where laughter is a sign of embarrassment or politeness rather than genuine amusement. Blake (2007) argued that linguistic funniness not only has the laughter provoking “funny haha” aspect, but also the unexpected deviance aspect, as in “funny peculiar” (p. 134), for example, there is a *funny* smell in this room. Gray, Jones & Thompson (2009, p. 4) pointed to the example of comedian Stephen Colbert’s satirical speech being criticised as not funny by “multiple commentators” to show that “some satire may not even intend to be funny in a belly laugh kind of way”.

A common mistake in attempts to define humour is to confine it within a narrow disciplinary lens, for example, linguistic, psychological, philosophical or physiological, when humour is clearly something complex that permeates various dimensions of human experience rather than being situated within a single one. Bremmer and Roodenburg (1997) resorted to a broad definition of humour as “any message

– transmitted in action, speech, writing, images or music – intended to produce a smile or a laugh” (p. 1), which is workable in so far as it encompasses a sufficient range of humour samples for investigation. However, for the actual analysis a more useful heuristic framework can be constructed by distilling the essence of what humour is by analysing the common characteristics of the dominant and resilient theories that have been put forth, namely superiority, release and incongruity.

2.3.1.1 *Superiority Theory*

One of the earliest records of a discussion on humour was Plato’s account of a dialogue between Socrates, Protarchus and Philebus, in which Socrates theorised that humorous amusement is always achieved at the expense of another person:

Let this, then, be the principle of division; those of them who are weak and unable to revenge themselves, when they are laughed at, may be truly called ridiculous, but those who can defend themselves may be more truly described as strong and formidable; for ignorance in the powerful is hateful and horrible, because hurtful to others both in reality and in fiction, but powerless ignorance may be reckoned, and in truth is, ridiculous.

(Plato, 360 BCE)

Plato’s and Aristotle’s thoughts on humour formed the basis of a class of theories known as superiority theories, which posit humour is used to put down others or to elevate oneself, and therefore tends to be hostile and aggressive. Hobbes (1800) is widely credited for being the first to propose this idea formally: that laughter arises within us as a result of the vainglory we experience when we see the misfortune of others. Bergson (1885) conceptualised laughter with a slightly different slant: as a rebellion against the stiffness and *automatisme* (i.e. mechanisation) of human behaviour. Since then various attempts have been made to explain why or how humour is used to gain a sense of superiority or to gain the upper hand in a situation: evolutionary, which tracks humour as a form of Darwinian adaptation of the fittest (Ludovici, 1932); hostility, which views humour as a form of ridicule of others’ minor mishaps (Rapp, 1951); disparagement, where humour is achieved mostly through some form of passive-aggressive stereotyping (Martin, 2010; Suls, 1972); dispositional, which mocks a humiliated enemy (Zillmann, 1983); vicarious, where superiority is gained through an agent (La Fave, Haddad, & Maesen, 1976); and game, which sees humour as a pursuit of the fun and challenge of winning (Gruner, 2011). Common

to these theories is the interlocutor's aim, regardless if it is negative or positive one, to come up on top of the situation as a victor.

2.3.1.2 *Release Theory*

French philosopher Penjon (1893) reasoned that laughter is a pleasurable expression of *liberté* (or freedom) and spontaneity. Freud (2016), who collected and studied a large corpus of jokes, developed a theory of humour that concluded more precisely that humour, similar to dreams, is related to the unconscious and pleasure is therefore a result of the release of psychic energies built up through the repression of hostile or sexual feelings, of emotions and even intellectual energies. Human beings are constantly subjected to cultural and societal constraints and are expected to relentlessly self-censor on matters relating to one's natural functions like sexuality and bodily functions. They are also constantly mindful of what socially acceptable behaviour is and what it is not, for example, talking sensibly and logically, behaving with decorum and so on. This suppression of one's behaviour builds up a reservoir of energy that will result in a burst of laughter when the restraint is suddenly removed, so that a homeostatic state is achieved. The view of humour "as a mental process" was supported by Kline (1907, pp. 432-433). Darwin too (1998) investigated the release (or relief theory) from the perspective of the evolution of man and animal's emotions, and recorded accounts of highly excited German soldiers predisposed to bursting into laughter at the tiniest of jokes before the siege of Paris, due to their heightened awareness of danger.

2.3.1.3 *Incongruity Theory*

The incongruity or contradiction theory has perhaps the most adherents because of the apparent plentiful data available to demonstrate it. Kant (1987) postulated that "[l]aughter is an affect that arises if a tense expectation is transformed into nothing" (p. 333). Schopenhauer (1819), another proponent of this theory, argued that

...in everything that excites laughter it must always be possible to show a conception and a particular; that is, a thing or event which certainly can be subsumed under the conception and therefore thought through it, yet in another and more predominating aspect does not belong to

it at all, but is strikingly different from everything else that is thought through that conception (p. 270).

In other words, there is an assumed norm gained through acculturation or conditioning, which when violated or contradicted, can be perceived as amusing. This is most clearly demonstrated in the vast number of jokes and funny stories where “we are led along one line of thought and then booted out of it” (Mindess, 1971, pp. 21-22). The following joke illustrates how the reader is led to think of the man’s innocence but his response dashes that presumption immediately, creating a twist that gives rise to the amusement:

Judge: You are acquitted of bank robbery.

Accused: Does this mean I can keep the money?

2.3.1.4 Limitations of humour theories

Kline (1907, p. 426) noted how “these time honoured theories” have stubbornly resisted “a Hegelian synthesis” and continue “to perpetuate...irreconcilable camps”. Bremmer and Roodenburg (1997) noted a common mistake by scholars who try to harmonise the various humour theories. In their “endeavour to find an all-encompassing theory of humour and laughter, there is a tacit presupposition that there exists something like an ‘ontology of humour’, that humour and laughter are transcultural and ahistorical” (p. 3). Humour is determined not just by the simple fact of the humorous piece but also by the manner and context it appears in (W. A. Coupe, 1969). For example, Davies (2010) questioned the very notion of Hobbes’ and Freud’s hostility and superiority. To him “[j]okes can be used to illustrate a point but the point has to be already clearly in place in the audience’s minds, for a joke is too ambiguous to be a sure way of putting it there. Jokes are simply a bonus” (p. 203). He reasoned that the very laughter a joke provokes detracts from any strong feeling of hatred or moral indignation the audience may have for the target.

It is therefore of little surprise that attempts to integrate these classical theories have yielded unsatisfactory results, and further attempts have been all but abandoned. The lack of success could also be in part due to a linear assumption of the theories as being mutually exclusive. This mode of thinking

limits the generalisability of these perspectives when the adoption of a more eclectic approach can allow for the overlapping of the theories that can lead to a broader application. It is possible to have all three elements of superiority, incongruity and release present in a single amusing situation, even though, conversely, the presence of all three is not necessary every time for it to be funny. For example, the fall of a pompous man after slipping on a banana skin that prompts laughter, clearly demonstrates a perception of incongruity as it breaches the normal expectation of a self-important person to walk with dignity. If the observers harbour any resentment against the man's pretentiousness, a "serve him right" sense of superiority is a plausible explanation as well. In the absence of any hidden resentment, it is also possible for those laughing to feel a sense of superiority, not because they despise him but because it was not they themselves who slipped and fell and because the misfortune has fallen on someone else. This sense of relief overlaps with the release theory, because of the tension from being aware "it could have been me". There also likely exists a psychological tension that stems from the social norm to restrain oneself from laughing at someone else's misfortune, especially if that person is higher up in the social hierarchy. Therefore, a burst of laughter is manifestly a form of release of that tension.

Clearly these three theories by themselves still do not fully explain the funniness of a situation as cultural factors that affect humour perception must be considered too. For instance, the man may be a highly respected member of society and witnessing his fall may evoke horror or concern rather than amusement, despite the clear incongruity of the situation. In the case of someone highly respected or dearly loved, devoted fans may wish they could have taken the fall in the place of the victim, which is a clear contradiction of the superiority explanation. It would seem that the theories are useful only in explaining *a posteriori* why something may be perceived as funny. The presence of those elements, divorced from cultural and environmental factors, cannot reliably predict funniness *a priori*, and the practical impact or result therefore becomes central to any discussion of the theories rather than their mechanics. It is likely due to this that Kuipers (2008) finds "purists" advocating any of these theories today rare. Instead a more reasonable approach would be to view humour through the lens of its social function (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). Humour is often regarded by sociologists as the "unserious" business of everyday life" that encompasses "interactions, emotions, play, leisure, private life, and other

things not directly related to great developments on the macro-level of society” (Kuipers, 2008, p. 365). However, there are studies that have shown empirically that humour “maintain[s] and support[s] the social order” by providing control and cohesion through the creation of solidarity, social acceptance and approval, shared experiences and identity building within a group (Kuipers, 2008, pp. 368-370).

2.3.2 The utility of political humour

In applying the humour theories to political humour, it can be seen that while the intended effect of humour cannot always be reliably predicted, the humorous intention of the humour producer may be reliably explained using all three theories, although the empirical data suggest that incongruity is by far the most popular theory as far as political humour is concerned (Colletta, 2009, p. 872). In using the Latin term *ludibrium*, a word with negative connotation, to describe political humour, Plass (1988), for example, is clearly drawing from the incongruity theory when he said, “the peculiarly derisive dimension to political events which it represents is tied to a breakdown in normal restraint and seriousness” (pp. 15-16). However, Meyer’s (1990) study of then US Governor Ronald Reagan’s use of humour during his 1980 presidential campaign to criticise the federal government, demonstrates that all three theories can be in operation. By making fun of the inefficiency and ineptness of the incumbent Carter government, incongruity was chiefly utilised. Superiority was achieved through showing up what was obvious to everyone except the government. When dealing with serious issues like a bleak economic climate, relief humour was used by Reagan to release the tension in his audience.

However, the intention behind the use of humour goes beyond eliciting a laugh. Humour has practical social functions not explained by the classical humour theories. While these theories are useful as far as examining humour as an end itself, they have their limitation for explaining what it is used for, i.e. when it is used as a means to some other end. For instance, Meyer (1990) highlighted how modern politicians like Reagan utilized humour for very utilitarian and strategic purposes, like putting his audiences at ease, to evoke a positive response from them and to enhance his credibility. Controversies

were given a humorous touch to soften the impact and place the audience in a position more open to persuasion.

Nilsen (1990) made an important distinction between the use of humour by politicians and by their critics:

From the point of view of the politician himself, humour can be used to define political concepts, to disarm critics, to establish detente, to establish a position or make a point, to bond, to relieve tension, and to provide a substitute for actual physical or military confrontation. From the point of view of the political critic, humour can be used to expose chauvinism, to expose ineptitude, to expose oppression, and to expose pretentiousness.

(Nilsen, 1990, p. 35)

This list of social functions of political humour is by no means exhaustive. The attention of this present research project centres on the viewpoint of the political critic, which can be broadly summed up as using political humour to provoke and induce social and political change. Change can be operationalised as providing alternative political views, promoting resistance, rallying activists to action and to oppose political oppression and social injustice. While these may be the intended aim of political critics, Tsakona and Popa (2011) argued that empirical evidence suggests that reality falls short of these ideals as “humour serves mainly two functions: it conveys criticism against the political status quo and it recycles and reinforces dominant values and views on politics” (p. 2). This provides a valuable framework for the evaluation of citizen satire in Malaysia and Singapore in this study, as my data can provide empirical evidence to either further support Tsakona and Popa’s argument or contradict it in showing that political humour can indeed further a cause by tapping into polarised views and expanding the political battle.

2.3.2.1 A Passive subversion tool

Without diminishing the relevance of the superiority and release theories in any way – both aspects are clearly evident in the case studies in subsequent chapters – the perspective of satire exploiting the incongruous reality of a society to mock the inadequacies and failings of politicians and their decisions and actions appears to be most common among both the producers and viewers of citizen satire in the

present study because of its focus on what satire adds to the political battlefield. Within an oppressive context this form of humour taps into a context of polarised politics to exploit the polarities. The literature establishes well that political wit is commonly hostile and often used as an offensive weapon (W. A. Coupe, 1969; Larsen, 1980; Plass, 1988; Speier, 1998). Kemp and Blomkamp (2013, pp. 244-245) find political humour inherently negative as it criticises and undermines rather than proposes positive solutions to political problems, although, admittedly, it can also engage the public by “questioning claims, examining character and challenging power when misused”. Where political humour is deemed as either subversive or criminal by the establishment, as in Malaysia and Singapore, humour can be seen to reflect and amplify political battles. This is evident in cultures shaped by European ideas of publicness. Political humour has different forms and claims to power at different cultural moments and so a brief historical survey can draw out some of the cultural modes of humour that have become significant.

Humour, particularly satire, flourished during the Enlightenment, because in an Age of Reason, art was often seen as a mirror of society, and through the exposure of the incongruity within themselves, and using an opponent’s argument and leading it to a logical but absurd and extreme conclusion, it was reasoned that people would seek to correct their faults (Colletta, 2009). But even before then, the formal role of humour in politics was already entrenched through traditional fools and jesters, a role present in every recorded culture of the world. Nelson and Janick (1998) describe the function of the fool thus:

With their pranks and parodies, fools question prevailing order, and their objectivity makes them at once comic individuals who are too removed to suffer and ironists who see existence as absurdity. Fools mock social structures, individual righteousness, passionate personal relationships and the mutating and fragile underpinning of human thought—language itself. Fools, then, operate as anti-rulers, offering society sceptical, unencumbered viewpoints that scorn pride and challenge such concepts as logic, cause, reward and solution (p. xiv).

The court jester became a social institution in Western Europe in the 15th century (Villanueva, 1982, p. 385), but as European courts declined as a result of major social changes like industrialisation, urbanisation, and political revolutions, the role of the court jester, too, gradually faded away and the

mantle of public political commentary through humour was taken up by the growing literary and artistic community. Townsend (1997) documents how, in response to the Carlsbad Decrees of 1819 that were intended to “turn back the clock” for the upper class and suppress political dissent (pp. 203-204), commercialised humour in Germany developed to subvert the decree. In addition to political revolutions, the Industrial Revolution – which brought about an increase in literacy in Europe, the availability of cheaper paper and new printing technology, as well as reduction in transportation costs as a result of the railroad – also provided conditions ripe for the birth of a new genre in popular publication – joke books and caricatures. Part of the argument of this study is that Malaysia and Singapore, both of which have inherited the British Westminster style of parliamentary democracy, follow a somewhat European trajectory in terms of how dissenting voices challenge the status quo using humour, as forms of citizen satire. Political cartoons, Internet memes and YouTube videos, although similar to those in the West, undeniably appropriate local cultural elements in their humorous contents. For this reason, I argue that the European model provides a relevant heuristic framework for this study, of which more will be said in the next chapter on methodology.

2.3.2.2 *Graphic/Visual satire*

As the technological revolution of the Industrial Age opened new ways for dissenting voices to be heard by a wider audience, the Internet too has opened up channels for creative expressions of opposition in both Malaysia and Singapore. Today’s Internet memes mirror the proliferation of political cartoons in 19th century Europe. Although the Carlsbad Decrees conflict was not the beginning of political caricature, it is arguably the beginning of the mass mediation of political humour. Johnson (1937) noted that it was actually 17th century Holland, teeming “with excellent artists, and as a flourishing republic was one of the few countries where men might speak their minds freely” (p. 21) that was the birthplace of the art, suggesting that political cartooning arose and flourished in a context of relative political openness. It is not unreasonable to theorise that there is a parallel with modern Internet memes, because when the Internet was first introduced in Malaysia and Singapore, there were indications that both governments entertained the idea of relaxing their strong grip on the New Media (see previous chapter on Background).

Modern day cartooning can be traced back to William Hogarth (1697-1764), England's earliest renowned graphic satirist, and generally acknowledged as the father of modern cartooning. But it was James Gillray (1757-1815), whose depictions of the contemporary Napoleon "did much to build in England a cohesive public unity" against the French emperor, who was credited as the first great political cartoonist (I. S. Johnson, 1937, p. 23). Scholars found it useful when discussing graphic or visual satire, to distinguish between *caricatures* (from the Italian *carcare*), and *cartooning* (from the Italian *cartone* for stout paper, signifying the line drawings on them). Johnson (1937, p. 21) suggested that the meaning of *carcare* ("to load") implies exaggeration or a distorted representation of an individual, while in cartoons, it is "the more or less distorted representation of issues, situations, and ideas" that is the defining feature, although she also noted that in England caricature was used to signify both forms. These distinctions are less relevant today as the term is now generic for describing any drawing (including animation) with or without satirical intent. More relevant is Medhurst and DeSousa's (1981, pp. 198-200) rationalisation of the political cartoon as a distinct "form of persuasive communication" with four rhetorical inventions, or *topoi* commonly found – political commonplaces, literary/cultural allusions, personal character traits and situational themes – and specific techniques that are "significantly different from those of the oral persuader". Ryan (1982) found a distinction between rhetorical messages that are defensive (*apologia*) and those that attack or are accusatory (*kategoria*). The latter is useful for identifying the target of the satire and whether it is the character of a public figure that is being criticised or that person's proposed policy (Wolfe, 1929). Based on these observations, modernity has seen the rise of certain visual forms of political humour with their own rhetoric that allow humour to be studied as a cultural practice.

2.3.2.3 *Literary satire*

Literary satire has been researched extensively in the field of literature or folk narratives, for example, Shakespeare's humour, and it could even be argued that, as the role of the traditional fool declined, it was gradually remediated as characters within theatrical plays, like Shakespeare's Fool in *King Lear*, Trinculo in *The Tempest*, Costard in *Love's Labour's Lost* or Feste in *Twelfth Night*, where the fool continues its role in society vicariously. Much attention has been focused on the nature of satire. Older scholarship attempted to define its nature based on form (Frye, 1944) but, as it became more and more apparent that formal satire theories have severe limitations (Phiddian, 2013), later scholars broadened their scope to look at authorial intention instead (Jack, 1997; Kuiper, 1984). Authorial intention is not without problems either. Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946) had earlier pointed out the fallacy to presume that the author's intention is available or even desirable (p. 468). Barthes' (1967) *Death of the Author* is frequently cited as the final nail in the proverbial coffin of the "untenable" authorial intention approach (Phiddian, 2013, p. 48). However, the "death" of authorial intention may have been greatly exaggerated as it will quickly prove difficult if not impossible for anyone trying to establish the nature of satire without the audience members imagining "a shaping intention (at least a 'point' being made) for the work to be intelligible as satire. It is necessary to ascribe a rhetorical purpose to it even if others see the purpose differently..." (Phiddian, 2013, pp. 48-49). In other words, a single, universal agreement as to the purpose of a satire is not a prerequisite; what is necessary is the agreement that there is a rhetorical purpose, that the author has an intention to make a point. One well known research project combined formal analysis with rhetorical purpose identification to develop an automatic satire detection algorithm for the web (Abercrombie, 2009; Burfoot & Baldwin, 2009). The quest for such a digital function illustrates how this rhetorical purpose is not universally recognised and examples of satire being taken seriously are not uncommon, as illustrated by the Chinese media's incorrect reading of The Onion declaration that North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un is the sexiest man alive (CNN Wire Staff, 2012 ; Simon, 2012).

Research looking at literary satire as it is situated, or within the context in which it is circulated, is less wide-ranging. This is especially true of satire in the mass media (Bremmer & Roodenburg, 1997, p. 3),

which is of particular interest to this present study. Corner (2012), while acknowledging literary satire's privileged position, also makes an important point that the genre has expanded beyond the traditionally narrow confines and "now covers a range of media performances" (p. 1054). All these new humorous media performances are in urgent need of scholarly attention. For instance, in the 1960s political satire gained widespread, popular traction through television broadcasting, in a large part due to the increasing independence of the media, which "contributed to the cumulative empowerment of the people" (Curran, 2002, p. 137). Political satire is often seen as contributing to the public scrutiny of popular governments and also facilitating public discussion – a critical but idealised function of the mass media as the Fourth Estate that echoes the Enlightenment paradigm of humour as a mirror to human foibles. Newer theoretical paradigms have moved away from this self-improvement idea and have expanded to examining "perception and differing opinions" (Colletta, 2009, p. 861) using the lenses of "power, gender, class and race" in vogue in the late 20th century (Phiddian, 2013, p. 47). Theories like post-structuralism, post-colonialism (Ball, 2015) and post-modernism (Lowe, 1996) have similarly been employed. Recent satire research is also looking more closely at audience reception (A. Johnson, Rio, & Kemmitt, 2010). The shift away from formal studies of satire and from looking for a single authorial intention⁶, to looking for general rhetorical purposes and at audience reception informs my approach to the four case studies of this project and provides a general direction for the investigation.

2.3.2.4 *Satire in the 21st century*

Satire is attracting renewed interest today, in part thanks to comedians like Stephen Colbert (2013), and Jon Stewart (2013) of the *Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* respectively, who are considered "major player[s] in the mediation and performance of politics" (Higgle, 2015). An example would be Colbert's 2006 speech at the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner, when he lampooned various contemporary White House issues in the presence of President George Bush himself. This is highly reminiscent of the court jester in the presence of the king (Carr, 2012, p. 2833) and to an extent, can be

⁶ While the intended meaning of the author may not always be easily ascertained, this thesis nevertheless acknowledges that there are often common orthodox interpretations to many satirical work that forms as the central point of reference, with other interpretations as outliers.

read as a remediation of the humorous tropes of the past, where humour exposes the moral failings of the powerful by holding up a mirror to their foibles.

The theoretical significance of these two American satirists has expanded beyond historical models to include their ability to subvert conventional media gatekeepers and to set the agenda for what is considered newsworthy by the mainstream media, rather than the humour in itself. The true impact of their stories is not in their TV broadcasts but in the shows' "afterlife on the Internet" (Carr, 2012, p. 2829). Long after the broadcast is over, videos uploaded to the Internet are shared and circulated through the official websites of the show as well as on YouTube and Facebook, and spread as Internet memes (which will be discussed further in a later section). Poor (2006) corroborates that the power lies not so much in the satire used as in the Internet's ability to circumvent traditional gatekeepers.

It is not just a simple matter of avoiding gatekeepers, or choosing some over others, for either receivers of news or those who make the news... Instead, the entire media environment must be considered, and by doing so we can see how newsmakers move through that environment and utilize different media elements for different purposes (p. 42).

Poor argues that each medium occupies different niches within the media environment and the Internet, with its "always-on nature", can now be a threat even to the 24-hour news media. Jenkins (2006, p. 31) describes this as part of the "extension synergy" and "franchising" of opportunities typical in the media convergence process. Day (2011) goes a step further by arguing that convergence is also occurring at the intersection of new Internet technology, political humour and serious political discourse, as various new genres of sophisticated political parody, irony and satire in the form of news and documentaries are spawned, and as they metamorphose into increasingly pervasive and dominant methods of political communication.

The use of satire to bypass gates and gatekeepers hints at how humour's power is changing yet again as the media landscape changes. This newer direction posits satire not as a research end in itself but a means to a different end, where it is a vehicle and can define the scope of this citizen satire study in Malaysia and Singapore, where the freedom of expression is limited.

2.3.3 Online political humour

Social movements and media are two extensively researched fields, but their point of intersection is relatively new (Dahlgren, 2013). Protest movements are increasingly making use of interactive digital media. Humour, albeit a small part of the movement, appears to be an integral part of the traffic. Corner (2012) pointed out that the “slightly patronising” approach to political humour as a sort of ante-room to proper politics is gradually joined by studies that look at “how its cognitive and affective dynamics are quite centrally involved in the construction and maintenance of political culture and political subjectivity” (p. 1053). Cammaerts et al. (2013, p. 5) highlight four areas where the utilisation of media and protest movements can intersect: the importance of visibility, the nature of symbolic power, the role of technology/networks and audiences/publics. Apart from violence, humour is the other factor that has a critical role in raising visibility for social movements. Teune (2013, p. 209) argues that while visual representations for protest movements are vital, given the use of iconic images, symbols, or clothing, it is understudied and tends to be addressed for mere illustrative purposes. This, he claims, is especially anomalous given that “images move people more intuitively than words”. Jenks (1995, p. 1) argues that in Western society sight provides the most immediate access to the external world and is conflated with cognition, which the etymology of the word “idea”, derived from the Greek “to see”, clearly illustrates. Borrowing from linguistics, Teune also proposes that visuals could be analysed for their visual jargon, styles, the logics behind the visual elements in conjunction with their communicative purposes, as well as the values the producer may be advocating. The visual aspect of humour, although not the only focus, is central to this study as pictures and videos, broadly labelled as Internet memes, tend to form the bulk of humorous messages circulated for such purpose and this study argues that such memes are a form of remediated political cartoons and caricatures. Jenkins (2006, p. 23), citing historian Lisa Gitelman, explains that media works on two levels: a medium is a system of delivery, i.e. the technology, but a medium is also the set of protocols or social/cultural practices that develops around that technology. In Internet memes we see not a displacement of one technology by another but a shift in the protocol by which media is produced and consumed.

2.3.3.1 *Facebook*

Facebook is an important platform for this study because of its popularity as well as its unique character. To underscore its importance Halpern and Gibbs ("about the mrbrown show," n.d., p. 1159) noted that together with YouTube, Facebook is the "most used social media managed by the White House". In 2011, Singapore became the country that spends the most time on Facebook in the world (Experian, 2011). Internet World Stats' (2015) updated the Singapore figures to 4,653,067 Internet users as of 31 December 2014. Placing the population for the year 2015 at 5,674,472, this roughly represents an 82.0 per cent penetration. Facebook subscriber numbers on Nov 15, 2015 stood at 3,600,000, which represents a 63.4 per cent penetration. In the same report, Malaysia had a population in 2015 of 30,513,848. As of 31 December 2014, 20,596,847 were Internet users, a 67.5 per cent penetration. Of these, 18,000,000 were Facebook subscribers on 15 November 2015, or a 59.0 per cent penetration.

Facebook, being a subset of the Internet, can be analysed in general terms as above but, beyond that, it also possesses characteristics that enable it to play its own unique role. For instance, Miller (2011) argues that rather than creating social networks like other sites, Facebook actually reconstructs and maintains offline networks. Due to the increase in mobility and urbanisation, there is a decline in sociality in modern society and Facebook has the capacity to replace this void. Critics like Hern and Chauk (1997) have called the idea of an Internet community or its democratic function as a "big lie", but this was before the advent of Web 2.0 and Facebook, which has to some measure clearly mitigated some of the problems identified by them. For example, the criticism that its impersonal decontextualized nature that is divorced from "rational communities, in localities, in ecologically sound social groups" (p. 39) is no longer valid if Miller is correct. Should Miller's conclusion be generalised more widely, the political humour on Facebook can become a fair reflection and magnification of the offline political culture and sentiments of the participants within a Facebook community.

Another important feature of Facebook is News Feed, introduced in 2006, which serves to aggregate not just news about an individual but it also provides links to pictures, articles and videos – including political ones – that have been viewed by other users (Council, 1999). Using Katz and Lazarsfeld's

(1970) “two-step flow of communication” model, users are seen to be elevated to opinion leaders within their own circle or communities, although the actual relationships in Facebook is non-linear and much more complex due to the interactive and participatory nature of Facebook, and the user takes on the role of opinion leader frequently in turns (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015). Mackey’s (2012) proposition that Facebook comments, as a literary feature, open a window into society as well as about themselves in relation to society is more persuasive. She argued that literary theorist Kenneth Burke’s (1969a) theories of dramatism, symbolic interactionism and the concept of language can serve as a useful framework to analyse and understand how users construct a narrative of their perception of the world and, in the context of the present study, the humour and the political drama unfolding. Essentially, according to Burke’s theory, human life is a drama and can be analysed according to the five key elements (or Pentad) inherent in all dramas: act (what is happening), scene (where this is taking place), agent (who are the actors), agency (how did they do what they did), and purpose (why did the drama happen). Mackey suggests that the comment forum is analogous to the scene, the post to the action and the posters or commentators are the agents. She cites Burke’s (1969a) “principle of drama that the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene” and argues that the Facebook comments will be reasonably consistent with the nature of the community of “friends”. It was reasonable for her to draw a parallel between Facebook and Burke’s parlour, where occupants of the metaphoric parlour come and go, and newcomers can choose to engage in on-going conversations started by those who had arrived earlier, and often depart while the conversation continues. This Facebook parlour is a source of rich data for understanding the online community surrounding the instances of political humour.

This thesis is not ignoring the contentious debates around social media and cyber-utopianism of Web 2.0 (Dahlberg, 2009; Gournelos & Gunkel, 2011; Morozov, 2012). There are legitimate concerns about Facebook’s increasingly dominant role in news dissemination and its gatekeeping power, for example, its decision to delete a historic photograph from the Vietnam war from the Facebook page of Aftenposten, Norway’s largest newspaper (Wong, 2016). Instead, Facebook, despite the misgivings of many scholars about its commercial interests and how it may interfere with the users’ activities, is taken

as is taken simply as a media platform that adequately enables the function of socio-political discourse at the level this thesis is studying, where no noticeable interference or conflict with their corporate interests has been detected. Facebook's high level of penetration in societies like Malaysia and Singapore also signifies its huge potential of approaching Habermas's (1991) democratic public sphere in virtual space. One oft-cited problem with Habermas' ideal public sphere⁷ is it rarely takes place but the statistics above suggest that the digital divide has been diminished to a large extent by Facebook, at least in certain parts of the world. Using the metaphor of a working room "where public opinion is (re)shaped" and where "competitive points of view" are put forth and where "they reassemble in the form of a logic discourse" Buturoiu (2014, p. 47) postulates that Facebook, more than a virtual tool of communication, can be conceptualised as part of the larger European public sphere, which she argues is made up of a multitude of public spheres competing for dominance, and therefore, Facebook comments can be a stable articulation of public opinions. Her proposition is very much in line with the notion of multiple public spheres of other scholars where each of these smaller spheres is conceptualised to represent smaller interest groups – possibly identity-based, frequently homogeneous, and with members who can belong to several spheres – but all of which contribute to a larger deliberative body (Butsch, 2007; Lunt & Livingstone, 2013; Mauzy & Milne, 2002). Using the same model, I theorise that Facebook comments and posts function as smaller public spheres that contribute to the larger Malaysian and Singaporean discourse.

This notion is not without its limitations. Similar to criticism of Habermas' original model, Facebook as a public sphere can be faulted for the degree of plurality and quality (or lack thereof) of the deliberation it fosters. Findings by Halpern and Gibbs ("about the mrbrown show," n.d.), while confirming that social media do indeed open up deliberative spaces for political discussions, show the debates lack depth or intensity. Other studies (Klofstad, Sokhey, & McClurg, 2013; Nir, 2005) have produced conflicting results. Kearney (2013) suggests the quality of political communication and disagreement may be predicated upon the orientation of the site (i.e. how social or political it is).

⁷ This thesis does not take the position that the original Habermasian public sphere is achievable or even desirable but simply acknowledges his notion that there is a need for a democratic space in which public discourse that contributes to democratic goals should exist and Facebook provides such a space.

Facebook users, due to the more relaxed social setting of the platform, are “more likely to chime in when they encounter interesting political disagreements” (Kearney, 2013, p. 47). Wojcieszak and Mutz’s (2009) study similarly finds political disagreement more prevalent in sites that are non-politically oriented. Of course, this does not take into account users on social sites who may completely withdraw from political exchanges in order to avoid disagreements.

The actual quality also varies from social media channel to social media channel. Features like the News Feed, which alerts users of new activities by their peers, increase the likelihood of users being exposed to unsolicited political material and the chance of them being tempted to respond to the threads is augmented, as suggested earlier by Kearney (2013). Gustafsson’s (2012) study supports the argument that users who are not members of political parties or interest organisations are indeed “exposed to political content and requests for participation” (p. 1111) although he cautions, as do Baumgartner and Morris (2009), that they frequently choose not to respond. Therefore, although the impact of the messages is difficult to measure, it would appear that political humour has a great potential for finding its way to the consumer where more conventional political messages fail. The community within Facebook also presents inherent dynamics conducive to the sharing of ideas and thoughts. Jenkins (2006) views communities as “defined through voluntary, temporary, and tactical affiliations, reaffirmed through common intellectual enterprises and emotional investments” (p. 27). Facebook users, knowing their posts will appear on their friends’ Facebook walls, will consciously select posts that they regard as important enough that their friends would want to read. Pempek et al. (2009) suggest that this provides the emerging adults in their study the opportunity to display their identities in relation to “religion, political ideology and work, which are traditional markers of adolescent and young adult identity” (p. 236). It is not unimaginable to extend the same generalisation to the wider Facebook users.

2.3.3.2 An activism and social movement tool

It was established earlier that the distinction between political humour as mere entertainment and as a vehicle for carrying political messages, especially alternative messages, is not always clear. Tsakona and Popa (2011) contend that because political humour deconstructs the public image of political figures, satirists have to draw from *topoi* that are familiar and accessible to a wide audience, which limit

their ability to extend beyond their pre-existing views on politics or to promote political reform. Adding to this pressure is the ideological bias inherent in commercially owned media companies upon which professional satirists depend on as their platform. This claim is supported not just by the popular propaganda model of Herman and Chomsky (2008), which has media ownership as one of its five filters, but also the work of various scholars of political economy of communications (Golding & Murdock, 1991; McLuhan et al.; Mosco, 1996).

Tsakona and Popa may have overgeneralised their findings. While the empirical data they drew from clearly supported their claim that popular political humour preaches to the proverbial choir, and while recycling dominant political values and views have also been observed elsewhere in media studies (for example the “echo-chamber effect” that describes the phenomenon of users searching for content that strengthens their own prejudices and biases, as suggested by Goode (2010)), this may not find a parallel in Asia, where a very different political attitude towards democracy exists in both the rulers and the ruled.⁸ Their hypothesis needs to be tested in contexts like Malaysia and Singapore, which have been classified under a unique category of “hybrid democracies” that possess very different voter dynamics (Diamond, 2002). One major difference would be the greater focus on economic rather than political and liberal aspirations of the voters. The other is the respect for leaders and the disinclination to make fun of them. Third, is the political apathy among the voters, who for a long time preferred to focus on getting on with their daily living and leaving the running of the country to people they deem as more qualified than themselves (T. Lee, 2002; Skoric, Ying, & Ng, 2009). For the latter, Corner (2012, p. 1053) sees opportunities for the satirist to present political knowledge to the politically apathetic in more engaging and interesting ways.

Another shortcoming of the European examples is that they do not take into account user-created political humour on the Internet, which creates very different subtleties that will be discussed further along. Lastly, the focus of these European examples are limited to the use of satire to mock and

⁸ This does not invalidate my argument that the European models of political humour are relevant as a *heuristic* framework because of the political heritage of colonialism, as in the case of Malaysia and Singapore. Culturally it is common to demonstrate outward agreement which does not necessarily translate into support. This was evident in Singapore’s 2015 election where, despite massive online activities that indicated support for the opposition, the incumbent government was returned to power by a massive majority (Singh, 2016). A parallel could be drawn for political humour: an Asian audience could laugh at a joke without necessarily agreeing with its point.

undermine the legitimacy of political figures, but ignore the role of humour to gather, galvanise and mobilise support for political activism.

In an earlier reference it was mentioned that one vital function of humour in social movements is its ability to increase visibility of a cause without resorting to violence (Cammaerts, et al., 2013). Others, like Hammett (2010), argued that the study of political cartoons can function as a “barometer of press freedom, of government tolerance of free speech and critical thought, and of resistance to dominant power relations” (p. 2). Lipsky (1968) defined protest activity as a “mode of political action oriented toward objection to one or more policies or conditions, characterized by showmanship or display of an unconventional nature and undertaken to obtain rewards from political or economic systems while working within the system” (p. 1145). Protest movements are principally about highlighting problems faced by the powerless that are ignored by the powerful, and the primary purpose of protest activities is to induce via the communications media a third party, also known as the “referenced public” (that the powerful may be more sensitive to) to be involved implicitly or explicitly in the bargaining process. Davies (2007), however, took pains to point out that “[t]elling jokes does not make one part of the resistance, only a collaborator” (p. 300). This detail may be a matter for debate and more empirical evidence.

There is some preliminary evidence that bottom-up user-created humour has the potential to raise this appeal to the referenced public, although this requires further investigation (see case study of SMRT in Chapter 4). The use of humour can also be considered within a wider context of the entire media ecology of a social movement. Costanza-Chock (2013) cites research that shows “social movements are more effective when they adopt...*transmedia mobilization* strategies as a means to challenge symbolic power in complex media environments” (p. 97). Political humour may play a role within this transmedia mobilization strategy to engage the social base, to widen the circulation of a movement’s narrative and strengthen the culture within. For example, Ford and Ferguson (2004) provided empirical evidence that disparaging humour strengthens shared norms of prejudice. While this is usually viewed negatively in the context of social discrimination, it cannot be denied it can also be added as a tool to the activist’s arsenal for consolidating supporters’ sentiments for a cause, thus increasing its social capital. Much

research has been done to show that humour facilitates affiliation and connection among people (Treger, Sprecher, & Erber, 2013). Transmedia mobilization essentially involves a departure from top-down control of communication to a decentralised one where communicators move “from content creation to aggregation, curation, remixing and circulation of rich media texts” (Costanza-Chock, 2013, p. 97). From this humour’s role is quite apparent.

Transmedia mobilization is also a form of recognition that no single medium is sufficient for the success of a social movement. Central to social movements is the ability of activists to draw the attention of the mainstream media. Jenkins’ (2006) convergence theory argues that powerful interactions between the multiple media platforms, the related industries and the media audiences who are constantly moving restlessly from medium to medium are produced. Furthermore, this convergence is more than a technological process but also a cultural shift in how consumers source information dispersed across the various media platforms. How they process the information collectively will give rise to a collective intelligence that is more powerful than the sum of the individuals. Gamson (2004), citing Lipsky (1968) and Melucci (1996), writes that in “modern information-driven societies, protest operates to influence decision-makers primarily through indirect channels, such as the mass media and the Internet” (p. 269). At the very least, political humour can hijack the agenda of mainstream media, like the frequently cited case of the *Late Night Show* (Niven, Lichter, & Amundson, 2003). On a smaller scale, my first case study in the next chapter demonstrates how the use of Internet memes to highlight a socio-political issue in Singapore has led to a public demonstration as well as the capture of the mainstream media’s attention. Davies (2007) in his case study of a large corpus of post-war jokes, had argued the lack of evidence that jokes can be an effective form of resistance, that it boosts the oppressed and undermines the oppressor. Instead, jokes are mere safety valves for the oppressed, are a weak social force and function as a thermometer, which reflects the existing condition of a room rather than a thermostat, which is a device for the regulation and control of the temperature of a room. Carrying the analogy across, humour, according to Davies, is not sufficiently powerful on its own as a force to effect direct political change. While his argument seems convincing, it remains to be seen if his findings on jokes extend to the newer forms of humour, like the Internet meme and other digital satirical material.

2.4 Conclusion

The interactivity of Web 2.0 has made available a new and unpredictable power to the producer and/or consumer of media content. Even the distinction between the producer and consumer is no longer clear. In political terms, the new media is widely seen as having great potential to facilitate the democratic process and in addition to their two traditional roles (as a communication medium and a source of information) it is also deemed to have the ability to expand political discourse by its function as a virtual public sphere. A deterministic, zero-sum dichotomous approach to evaluate the usefulness of this new rising phenomenon is helpful only insofar as to create an awareness of the extreme poles (that the converging media is either a harbinger of ill or a panacea to the world's problems) as it can then allow a more nuanced understanding of the current debates along the spectrum between the highly polarised views.

The genealogy of political humour in this study was sketched using the assumption that the prevailing form of humour from each age was dependent on the available technology of the day, while the essence and purpose of the humour remained the same, and so political humour has been remediated from one period to another, for instance, satire in the 18th century, cartoons in the 19th to 20th centuries, and memes today. It was therefore useful to include in the design of this study an examination of whether Internet memes, particularly static visuals, share characteristics with the traditional political cartoon, and whether methods and frameworks used to study them will work on Internet memes as well. This will then correctly position Internet memes along the developmental timeline that portrays the perpetuation of an age-old form of political engagement.

A widely held paradigm in political humour research is to view it mostly as a subversion tool, with the intention to influence audiences and to see humour as being coupled closely and specifically to certain socio-political groups. However, there are arguments that expand the scope of research to include studying the context to learn how politics is being done using humour. Drawing from the various literatures reviewed above, the uses for political humour have also been found to include the following contextual functions:

- illustrating a point already present in the audience's minds
- reinforcing stereotypes
- disarming critics
- providing alternative political views
- promoting resistance and avoiding gatekeepers
- activating the already politically committed to action as part of transmedia mobilization
- opposing political oppression and social injustice
- undermining repressive regimes and questioning claims
- examining the characters of public figures
- challenging power when misused
- calling out incongruities

Apart from being a convenient checklist of things to look out for when examining the case studies of this thesis, these functions also underscore the importance of humour as an object of study, as it forms an integral part of society and culture. For this reason, this study of memes will be similarly less concerned with aspects like explaining or tracking of their spread, but will instead focus on the production process and their impact.

Satire studies have moved away from formal analysis and attempt to ascertain authorial intention, as these approaches have been found untenable in the wider scheme of things: for instance, the determination of authorial intent is either impossible and may even be undesirable. Instead, for it to work satire only requires the establishment of a rhetorical intent. This lends itself well to the application of traditional rhetorical devices, like *topoi*, or the dominant humour theories of release, incongruity and superiority. Satire research today also increasingly focuses on audience reception. Many of the trends in satire research have informed this present study. The various lenses utilised by satire scholars, for example, power, gender, class and race, allow a more focused understanding of the use and production of citizen satire.

Scholarship on social media has advanced the notion that Facebook is part of multiple spheres that contribute to a larger discourse and therefore can be a fair reflection and magnification of the offline

political culture and sentiments of the participants within a Facebook community. As with Habermas's original notion of the public sphere, Facebook as a public sphere has similar limitations, for example, questionable quality and diversity in terms of the discourse, and the problem of non-responses from users who "lurk". Finally, although lessons can be learned from the European model of the public sphere, there are Asian idiosyncrasies that must be taken into account when borrowing from the Western literature for this study. For instance, Asian societies tend to

- emphasise economic rather than political and liberal aspirations
- hold leaders in high regard and have a disinclination to make fun of them
- be politically apathetic and non-combative

Arising from this literature review, the overarching question to address in this thesis, then, is whether political humour on Facebook is contributing meaningfully to the Habermasian public sphere; one that is plural, accessible, and generates discussions of quality. Empirical data from the close examination of the memes of my four case studies should either corroborate or invalidate these expectations. In the Malaysian and Singaporean context, where public spheres in the past were severely limited in number and restricted, the Internet had opened up new spaces that are difficult for the respective governments to control. The sudden emancipation from severe media restrictions brought about by Web 2.0 thrusts members of both societies into the very "wild west" of the Internet. While this is true worldwide, the citizens' lack of prior experience in wider socio-political engagement and expressions makes them novices that are especially vulnerable in this untamed social terrain, where they are pitted against players who are more powerful, more experienced and with considerably more resources in the power game. The rules however, are uncoded and constantly being redefined. Humour appears to be a weapon of choice by the underdog and is playing a meaningful role in this contest. It is the documentation of this tentative foray into the arena and the taste of occasional success by the rookie satirist in the face of their Goliaths that makes this study of citizen satire of significance and importance.

3 Methodology and methods

This study draws a clear distinction between the oft confused terms “methodology” and “method”, with the former referring to the “theory of how inquiry should proceed...[that] “involves analysis of the principles and procedures in a particular field of inquiry” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 93) and the latter to the means by which data is captured, for instance, conducting a survey or interview.

The central focus of this study is the relationship between online use of political humour and the social world in which it exists. In order to explore the ways this particular media artefact, i.e. political humour, is part of everyday social interaction and also a part of the political world in Malaysia and Singapore, a form of qualitative sociological enquiry was sought as most appropriate. Prior to the Internet and social media, citizen satire was generally private and limited in circulation, restricted only to the sharing of jokes and the occasional graffiti, which in itself is a rare phenomenon, particularly in Singapore where strict laws prohibit what is regarded as anti-social behaviour (MacKinnon, 2012; Tong, 2012; Yahoo! News, 2013). The recency of online citizen satire means it is largely unexplored and poorly understood. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that “what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known” can only be uncovered and understood through a qualitative approach. The availability of abundant big data like those generated automatically by Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, lends itself well to computer-mediated quantitative analysis. However, these methodologies may not be very successful at explaining why political humour, and more precisely in this case citizen satire, is used and how its objectives are achieved. As Geertz (1973) notes, a quantitative description of a rapid contraction of the eyelid yields no insight as to whether it is a blink or a wink, nor what that wink suggests. The abundant statistical information on Facebook is easily accessible, but is limited in what it can tell us about what citizen satire does. While useful for determining how frequently a meme is posted, liked, or shared, it does not help this study in understanding what compels an ordinary citizen to take the time to create a meme and post it, why they risk incurring the wrath of others, why a meme strikes a chord or why one is amused by one meme but not another. As such, statistics will be included in the study only fleetingly and for specific descriptive purposes only.

3.1 Online ethnography

Technological advancement means that possibly over a billion people belong to one form of online community or another. Internetlivestats.com (2015) puts the number of Internet users globally at 40 per cent of the world's 7.3 billion population. The World Bank (2015) places Internet penetration for Malaysia at 67.5 per 100 people and Singapore at 82.0. These virtual social worlds, like those in the physical world, produce their own versions of cultures and meanings, and to gain a deep understanding of these computer-mediated societies, and an understanding of citizen satire and political humour in general, an ethnographic approach lends itself well to this aim.

This assumption is supported by the argument of scholars like Baym (1999), Correll (1995), Kozinets (2002), Markham (1998) and Hines (2000) that online media users form communities that display similar characteristics to physical ones and can be researched ethnographically, using traditional methods as well as newer "methodological procedures and protocols that have been agreed upon by a community of scholars" (Kozinets, 2009, p. 60). Gatson (2011) identifies two main approaches. The first is "[t]he extension of traditional collaborative ethnography, in which a network of participant observers in offline laboratories or networks, as well as online, work together (sometimes unknowingly) to produce ethnography" and second, "autoethnographic network mapping, in which a researcher grounds an online network map on herself or himself" (pp. 245-246).

Traditional ethnography of other cultures involves researchers choosing to live in a culture or society for several years, coming in close contact with the members of that society and communicating "solely through their own language" (Hannerz, 2003, p. 202) so that researchers can be thoroughly immersed in the unknown culture for a comprehensive engagement with that culture. Early forms of ethnography involved travels to unknown or remote geographic sites. This evolved over time to encompass ethnography in familiar urban sites where subcultures within a known dominant culture are investigated, for example, the consumption patterns of Harley-Davidson bikers (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), or drug users and HIV transmission (Ratner, 1993).

Geography and culture are closely linked as geographical features contribute to the shaping of cultures. This perspective of linking geography and culture is exemplified by the work of pioneers like Sauer (1920, 1952, 1969). The connection between the spatial dimension and culture has a parallel in the virtual as well. Anderson's (2012) metaphor of the media environment as a "mediascape" helps the analyst negotiate the virtual and connect them to the cultural practices both in the online as well as offline world. His mediascape compass points serve as a tool to identify the various aspects of the media environment, and link the online world's⁹ static "properties" and dynamic "processes" to its offline "consequences" – the observable phenomena that can then be evaluated for their "character", whether good or bad, helpful or otherwise. Just as in traditional cultural-geography the ethnographer bridges the site and the culture and in order to achieve this the ethnographer must have an "engagement with events as they happen in the field and...a holistic attention to all practices as constitutive of a distinct culture" (Hines, 2000, p. 21). This is to say the ethnographer must be immersed within a site to observe as well as be part of the group under study and be subjected to the same dynamics and forces that exert an influence on their behaviour and practices.¹⁰ This attempt to blend in as naturally as possible has been explained by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) thus:

Naturalism proposes that, as far as possible, the social world should be studied in its 'natural' state, undisturbed by the researcher.... Furthermore, the research must be carried out in ways that are sensitive to the nature of the setting. The primary aim should be to describe what happens in the setting, how the people involved see their own actions and those of others and the contexts in which the action takes place (p. 6).

Following the same logic, it became necessary for me, the researcher, to be fully immersed in the online environment, with an active presence in the political, humorous and cultural virtual world, just like the traditional anthropologist. To this naturalistic end I became a deliberate and purposeful user of Facebook, subscribed to various political and humour pages both in Malaysia, Singapore and other parts of the world. Gatson (2011), citing Bochner & Ellis (2002), Ellis (2004), Gatson (2003), Hancock

⁹ It is not useful to make the distinction between a virtual and real world, as the virtual, it can be argued, is no less a reality. Therefore, I have chosen to distinguish between the online and offline world.

¹⁰ This approach is not without limitations, as the metaphor of the spatial-culture dimension cannot be applied to the virtual media context. As there exist two realities in the virtual dimension – the online and offline – both aspects must be taken into account as each has its own respective culture. I chose to view the mediascape not merely an analytical space but the participants' real experience of both the online and offline spaces. In this respect, my interpretation of mediascape may differ from Anderson's original understanding.

(2007), Markham (2005) and May (2003) categorise this approach as auto-ethnography “wherein the researcher is the explicitly grounded native of a particular field site or social situation/status” (p. 247). Some may contest the approach taken in this thesis as ethnography in the strictest technical sense, as I do not map out an overall picture of the entire cultural landscape or ecosystem in the traditional fashion. However, I argue that what has been done in this project nonetheless falls under the ethnographic approach as I had used the media compass to navigate the cultural practices. Therefore, it is not the intention of this thesis to make totalising claims about the cultural site.

3.1.1 Multi-sited ethnography

The online political humour under study is characterised by the way it responds to current affairs and therefore not separated from the wider social and political context. In other words, it is not a discrete political act and therefore does not work on its own as a sustained offensive attack on any party. Instead, political humour is a culturally embedded practice and the choice of multiple sites across two countries instead of a single location is by design to recognise that humour culture transcends geographical and national boundaries. This departure from what might be seen as standard ethnographic practice (i.e. single-sited) it is not entirely innovative. Marcus (1995) already noted some time back that this shift in the ethnography trend from single- to multi-sites had become a source of anxiety to some while arguing that this less common ethnographic trajectory allows for a fuller examination of cultural meanings, objects and identities as they are circulated in a diffused time-space (p. 96). While single-site ethnography can produce refined and detailed results, there will inevitably be gaps between each single set of representations for individual local sites. Malaysia and Singapore, as explained in the Introduction chapter, share a common history up to their separation into distinct independent nations. However, they continue to be intricately linked in social, political and economic ways despite developing along very different tracks: Singapore is significantly wealthier per capita and its population boasts of a superior education system: its premier National University of Singapore ranks in 11th place in the QS world ranking compared to Malaysia’s University of Malaya at 151st position (QS World University Rankings® 2015/16, 2015). Singapore is politically dominated by the ethnic Chinese whilst the Malays

and Indians are on the fringe. Fourteen out of the 20-strong Cabinet are Chinese, with only four Indian ministers and two Malay giving a ratio of 7:2:1 in terms of ethnicity (Government of Singapore, 2015a). In parliament, out of 92 MPs, 68 MPs are Chinese (74 per cent), 11 Indian (12 per cent) and 13 Malays (14 per cent) (Government of Singapore, 2015b). This is consistent with the ethnic composition of the resident population of 74.3 per cent Chinese, 13.3 per cent Malay, 9.1 per cent Indians and 3.3 per cent of other races (S. Department of Statistics, 2014, p. 5).

In Malaysia, the opposite holds true, with the Malays at the helm of political power and the Chinese and Indians in the back seat. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2015 [2011]) breaks down the ethnic composition of Malaysia into ethnic groups Bumiputera (67.4 per cent), Chinese (24.6 per cent), Indians (7.3 per cent) and Others (0.7 per cent). While the Malaysian statistics did not breakdown the Bumiputera¹¹ category into its components, the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015) offered Malays at 50.1 per cent, and other indigenous groups as 11.8 per cent.¹² Out of 38 Cabinet ministers, only four are Chinese and one of Indian ethnicity (Prime Minister's Office, 2015). The Malaysian parliament House of Representatives has 222 seats, of which 48 are occupied by Chinese representatives and only eight by Indians (Parliament of Malaysia, 2015). The rest are representatives of the various Bumiputera groups.

Despite these differences, scholars of various fields have often found value in comparing the two countries (Andrew, Gul, Guthrie, & Teoh, 1989; Foo & Tan, 1988; Ghosh & Kwan, 1996; C.-H. Wee, Choong, & Tambyah, 1995). Ward and Kennedy's (1993) study of psychological and sociocultural adjustment during cross-cultural transitions illustrates well how similar Malaysians and Singaporeans are despite the difference in their socio-economic environment. They surmised that "Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand experienced greater social difficulty than Malaysian students in Singapore although there was no significant difference in mood disturbance. Consistent with the hypothesis, the magnitude of the correlation between psychological and sociocultural adjustment was

¹¹ Literally, "sons of the soil". This category consists of Malays and other indigenous groups.

¹² As the statistics are drawn from two separate sources the breakdown is presented to provide an approximate sense of proportion and cannot be taken as absolute.

found to be significantly greater in the Singapore-based compared to the New Zealand-based sample” (p. 221).

I similarly argue that in terms of control over socio-political information, beneath the surface difference, the two countries share much in common, too. Both liberally employ the use of intimidation and fear as a form of social and political control. Both regimes try to control free speech and limit the media. The gap between the two sites, as I see it, is in how the marginalised¹³ segments of the populations of two somewhat different countries are nonetheless united by a common dissatisfaction with their respective leaders and have chosen to express this dissatisfaction through humour. This provides a window offering a glimpse of what my research question in section 1.2.1 seeks to explore, i.e. how the citizens of these two countries circumvent restrictions to communicate dissent. The research problem of this study demands a commonality between the informants of both countries to form a translocal linkage between the two sites to take this study beyond a mere comparison of separate ethnographical sites. Hannerz (2003) argues that comparative studies in classical anthropology presume the absence of such linkages as the basis for comparing in the first place. With the linkages firmly established in this case study, the focus now is more on how the relationship among the various sites intertwines the members from the two countries rather than how they are different. The choice of the various Internet sites in this study is similarly informed by this multi-site perspective. A globalised world has resulted in people who are mobile, so real “locals” or “natives” are debatable concepts that are probably no longer relevant and of even more limited relevance to the study of Facebook sites and other virtual media. Singapore currently has a population of around 5.4 million. The World Bank places the number of Malaysians working in Singapore at 400,000 (Yong, 2013). This does not include those who are studying or Malaysians who have taken up permanent residency there, like myself. There are also former Malaysians who have taken up public office in Singapore, for example Minister Khaw Boon Wan (Prime Minister's Office, 2013). Therefore, considerations about how nationally bounded the object under study will be treated with some degree of fluidity in this study's context.

¹³ These segments of society are defined as marginalised by virtue of their inability to access freely public fora like the mainstream media to express their opinions.

3.1.2 Calibrating the ethnographic instrument

The researcher is the ethnographic instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006, p. 3). This precept dictates that I be a part of the community that consumes these memes so that my perception and perspective can be calibrated according to the indigenous digital population. Faced with the age old dilemma of ethnographers – to position oneself as a passive observer or active participant – I have decided to go beyond mere observation in order to gain a deeper understanding about why the participants view these memes and to find out what these texts mean to them, an approach that echoes Fox's (1990) ethnographic study of humour within social interactions, where he demonstrated how the interpretive ambiguity of humour disrupts a unitary understanding of the immediate social reality.

I have tried to identify the complex relationships between the various parties involved. To these ends, I subscribed to various sites to enable me to participate so that my activities and experience shape my perception and understanding of current politics and issues in tandem with the members of these communities. These communities included news sites, civil society groups, groups set up in reaction to certain controversies, fan pages of public figures, as well as humour sites. Table 3.1 below lists the pages for which I receive updates regularly on my Facebook News Feed. The variety of sites serve to provide me a broader context (including a global perspective) to inform my research.

Classification of site	Name of site
Digital culture	Pakalu Papito
	Disturb Reality
	Distractify
	Upworthy
	Mashable
	Sun Gazing
	ViralNova
	Boiling Mad Frog
	The Husband Chronicles
Humour site	Aunty Acid
	Quickmeme
	Men's Humour
	Cyanide & Happiness
	Cracked.com
	9GAG
	Unlawful Humor

Humorist

Magazine

Malaysia newspaper

Malaysia online newspaper

Malaysia political humour

Malaysian alternative news media

Malaysian artist

Malaysian blog

Malaysian dissident

Malaysian former minister

Malaysian humour site

Malaysian news portal

Malaysian newspaper

Malaysian NGO

Malaysian parody news

Malaysian political cartoonist

Malaysian political figure

Malaysian political humour

Malaysian politician

Malaysian Protest page

Malaysian socio-political site

News portal

News portal

NZ digital culture

NZ humour site

NZ newspaper

NZ satire

NZ TV news

I love it when someone's laugh is funnier than the joke

OmgHumor.com

Rob DenBleyker

Bill Maher

Foreign Policy

The Star Online

Free Malaysia Today

Malaysiakini

Only In Malaysia

The Malaysian Insider

Malaysiakini.TV

Ernest Zacharevic

MiLo SuaM

Alvin Tan

Datuk Zaid Ibrahim

Curi-curi Wang Malaysia

The Rakyat Post

Malaysian Digest

My SinChew

Political Studies for Change

MCLM

New Straight Times Malaysia

fakemalaysianews.com

Zunar Kartunis Fan Club

Raja Petra Kamarudin

Politicalgags

Malaysian Gags

Dyana Sofya

Teresa Kok

Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad

Lim Kit Siang (林吉祥)

Nurul Izzah Anwar

Anwar Ibrahim

Charles Santiago

Ong Kian Ming

Save Jalan Petaling & Jalan Sultan

1M Malaysians Agree to Cut the Pays of the Ministers not the Subsidies

Kami Boikot Buletin Utama TV3

1M Malaysians Reject 100-storey Mega Tower

BOYCOTT BIRO TATANEGARA!

100,000 People Request Najib Tun Razak

Resignation

The Ordinary Malaysian

Yahoo Malaysia

Yahoo Singapore

CNN

New Zealand Memes

Jono and Ben

Only Kiwis Will Get This

nzherald.co.nz

The Civilian

TV3

Singapore alternative news	Temasek Review
	TR Emeritus
	Theonlinecitizen
Singapore Citizen journalism	Stomp Straits Times
Singapore humour site	SGAG
Singapore newspaper	The Straits Times
Singapore newspaper	Today
Singapore NGO	TWC2
Singapore NGO	HOME Singapore
Singapore political cartoon	Cartoon Press
	Singapore Says Political Cartoon
Singapore politician	Kenneth Jeyaretnam TeamRp
Singapore protest page	Wake Up, Singapore
	In Solidarity with Roy Ngerng, The Heart Truths
	I want the government and people to work together for Singapore's future
Singapore public figure	Tan Kin Lian
Singapore tabloid	The New Paper
Singapore TV Network	Channel News Asia
Social, Political & Environmental artist	ArTIVISM
UK newspaper	Daily Telegraph
	The Guardian
	BBC
	The Telegraph
US filmmaker	Michael Moore
US magazine	TIME
US newspaper	Huffington Post
	The New York Times
US NGO	Films For Action
US protest	Occupy Wall Street
US public figure	George Takei
US satirical site	The Onion
US TV comedy	The Daily Show
World news	The WorldPost

Table 3.1: List of sites related to politics and humour subscribed to by researcher

While the majority of these sites are anti-establishment, this skew should be seen as characteristic of the phenomenon of Internet humour itself. Indeed, any attempt to remain objective in the way prescribed by the canons of positivist research would be naïve as to do so would constitute a failure to recognise that people in power seldom have the need to resort to satire to remain in power. Political humour, as discussed in the preceding Literature Review chapter, is the tool of the disenfranchised and it gives voice to the marginalised or those in disadvantaged positions. Therefore, it is unavoidable, indeed, it becomes desirable that I immersed myself in an environment that is clearly oppositional, as this was the only way to gain Pike's (1954) "emic" perspective that rejects the idea of a fixed or given reality in relation to the object of study. Consequently, as the researcher (and instrument) I am able to be

empathetic and sensitive to the passion and the angst of those who resort to citizen satire as a means to make their voices count. Authors have argued that such subjectivity, far from being a hindrance, can be valuable and I concur that my own life experiences, my personal values, predispositions and sympathies, my race and socio-economic status enable me to get closer to the informants (Heron & Reason, 1997; Lave & Kvale, 1995; Peshkin, 1988; Rennie, 1994; Schneider, 1999). For example, my permanent resident status in Singapore and my years of living and working in Singapore enabled me to understand better the frustrations of commuters who mocked the train breakdowns in the first case study. Being a current and still valid registered voter in Teresa Kok's constituency in Malaysia helped me gain access to a candid and relaxed interview for the final case study with Kok, who freely shared her thoughts and even her suspicions and conspiracy theories, giving me deep and meaningful insights into her beliefs, biases and the overall direction she was coming from. It is not the purpose of this study to show who is right. I have also, as anthropologists often seek to do, tried to step back as well as step into my subject. For that reason, I have deliberately relocated myself to New Zealand, far away from both target countries, to conduct this research so that I have the option of stepping out of my role as researcher and instrument to periodically regain a neutral perspective for the purpose of reflection.

Cognizant of the well-documented Hawthorne Effect (Adair, 1984), where the presence of the researcher may influence the behaviour within the community, I mitigated possible impact arising from it that might be unintended by excluding or minimising my contributions to the online communities. I did not want to artificially disrupt or reshape any discourse generated in response to the memes. Instead, I have limited my participation to performing what a member of an online community commonly does, for example, clicking on links, reading posts and comments, clicking the "Like" button or sharing posts and other more low-level efforts, and generally staying in the background without being completely passive. Ethical considerations mandated that my identity as a researcher be fully disclosed. This was achieved by posting a clear and lengthy description of who I am and my research project on my Facebook profile (Figure 3.1). I have also introduced myself to specific site owners to obtain their consent to research their pages. This is in line with my earlier stated objective to be firmly located within the mediascape I am mapping.

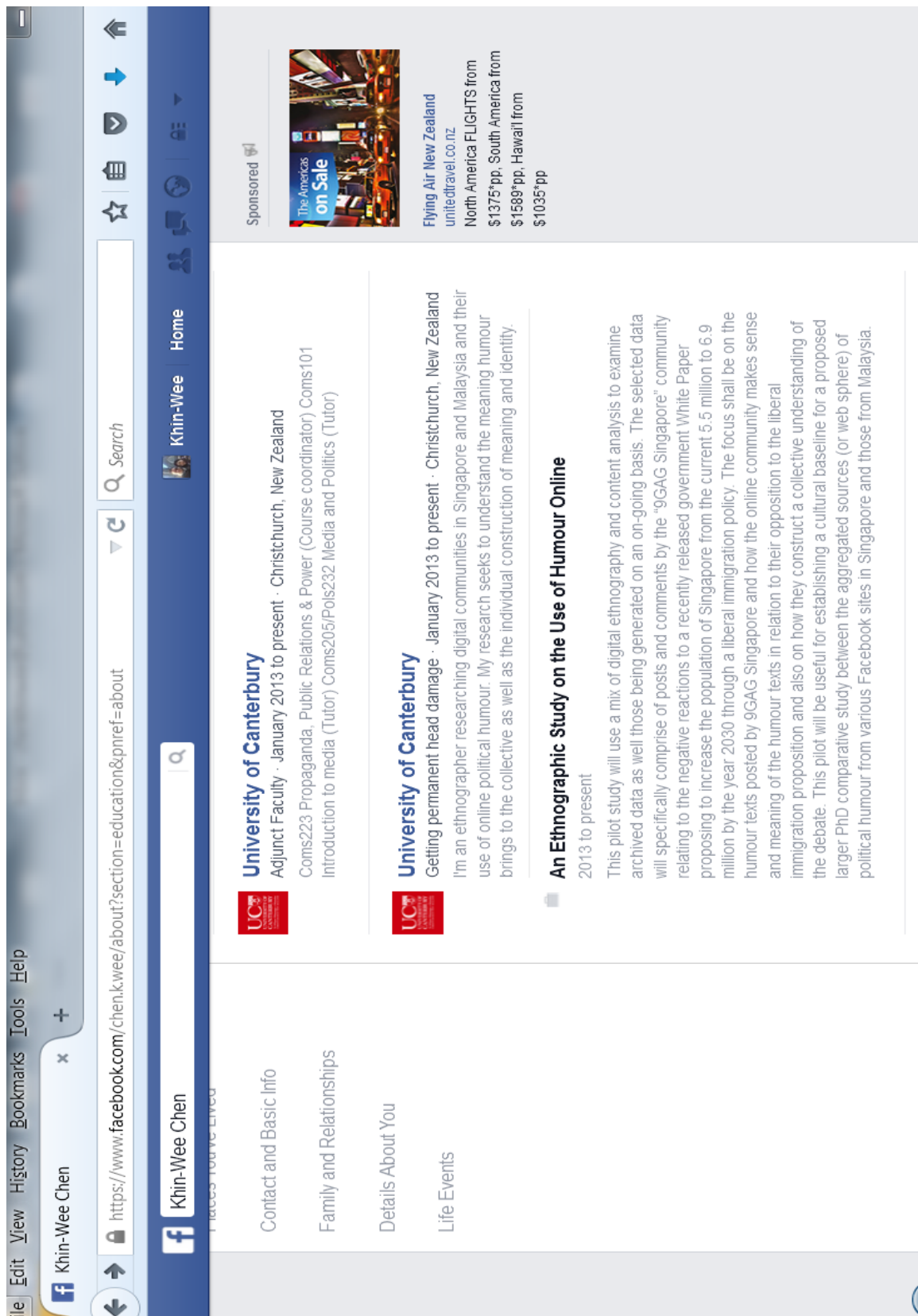


Figure 3.1 Screenshot of disclosure.

The decision to choose multiple sites for the fieldwork is in part motivated by a second aspect of the research design. The research is conducted around a number of case studies. A case study approach can anchor the contemporary phenomenon “within its real-life context” (Crowe et al., 2011, p. 1). Each case, whilst studied and treated as a discrete unit, is selected to be representative of the line of enquiry of this study’s research question (see 1.2.1). They in turn form part of a collection to make an integrated whole when conclusions across the cases are drawn (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2009). The cases were selected based on how interesting, significant or key a media phenomenon they were. The means by which the selection of the cases was made is discussed further below.

3.1.3 Ethical considerations

The publicness of Facebook has been fiercely debated (Bateman, Pike, & Butler, 2011; Baym & boyd, 2012; Jarvis, 2011). Although my status as a researcher was announced on my Facebook page, unless the list users and online community members know check my profile, they will not know my status as a researcher. This raises the question of impact upon the research in terms of ethics. Guided by the recommendations of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR)¹⁴ the guiding principle of harm has been employed contextually. Foreseeing danger is difficult and disciplinary, institutional, legal, cultural, or other constraint has always to be balanced with contextual requirements. Local contextual norms have to be considered. For example, do the participants and authors of the memes in Malaysia and Singapore perceive their Facebook presence to be public? Is the information posted considered public? In the case of the SMRT memes, the images were found through Google search, and are clearly in the public domain.

In consultation with the University’s Ethics committee, an assessment of the vulnerability of the communities and the authors was made on a sliding scale. Users were found to be less vulnerable than the producers, hence, consent from authors, but not commenters were secured. My presence on the comments forum is no difference to that of the Internet Brigade¹⁵, the police or the government officials

¹⁴ <http://aoir.org/ethics/>

¹⁵ See <https://jesscscott.wordpress.com/2015/08/25/pap-ib/>, <https://www.papbrigade.tumblr.com/about> or [facebook.com/Ibsingapore/](https://www.facebook.com/Ibsingapore/)

who monitor Internet activities. Singapore Internet users, in particular, are aware of the government's surveillance and it is highly unlikely that anyone would imagine their posts as private.

The SGAG memes were deemed to be a little more sensitive, which was why the owner's permission was sought and his identity kept hidden through the use of the pseudonym, Barry Schmelly. Teresa Kok, as a political figure was the least bothered by the issue of privacy and had signed her consent without hesitation at the start of her interview. So while individual written consent, particularly from the commentators, is desirable it is, apart from being impractical, placing a declaration on my Facebook page has been deemed as sufficient. Nevertheless, the data presented in this study has been scrubbed to remove any identifiers. And while all effort has been made to minimise harm, the AoIR guidelines also declare that "the uniqueness and almost endless range of specific situations defy attempts to universalize experience or define in advance what might constitute harmful research practice"¹⁶

3.2 Using case studies

The use of case studies as a strategy opens up the option for me to draw upon a range of research methods as appropriate to each case (Bryman, 1988; Creswell, 1994; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, 2003). I relied primarily on observing what went on online, and conducting documentary analysis of the abundance of data from the targeted sites. These texts, both written and verbal, lend themselves well to textual and content analysis.

When there was a need to gain more understanding of what goes on behind the scenes, face-to-face interviews with selected relevant people were conducted. Due to the informal nature of some meetings, for example, Singapore cartoonist Leslie Chew, a recording of the interview was not possible as we had agreed to meet in a noisy coffee shop for a "chat". Instead notes were jotted down immediately after our meetings. Similarly, my meeting with SGAG co-founder Barry Schmelly was informal and he chose

¹⁶ See <http://aoir.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ethics2.pdf>

the venue: a noisy pub with a live band performing in the background. While these were not ideal conditions for interviews, it was necessary to build “cultural sensitivity” into the research design, as recommended by Seiber (1993). Once again, notes were taken as soon as the meeting was over. However, in the case of Schmelly, we remained in contact using Facebook messenger and I was able to obtain clarification and further information about various points relating to SGAG and the socio-political scenario in Singapore in general. The conversations have been copied and securely stored. However, Schmelly has not given his permission for the conversation to be reproduced as an Appendix to this thesis. The face-to-face interview with Teresa Kok for the last case study was more in line with a traditional semi-structured interview with an audio recording at the interviewee’s office. A transcription of the interview was made and analysed qualitatively to identify themes (Aronson, 1994; Bogdan and Knopp Biklen, 2003; Boyatzis, 1998; Seale, 2004; Smith, 1992). Details of the methodology for Teresa Kok are outlined in section 7.2.1.

There were also informal meetings with convenience samples – obtained through “snowballing” (Babbie, 2001, p. 191) – of people who regularly view online citizen satire to understand their motivation. The insight gained provides the schema for conducting the documentary analysis of the sites in question. Joke telling relies on being an insider and these informants helped me gain a perspective that enabled me to interpret the memes more closely to how the average viewers were likely to understand the humour. For example, in Singapore, my adopted country, interacting with informants revealed a love-hate relationship Singaporeans have with the ruling party PAP that I was not aware of, as I was not born or raised in Singapore. As an outsider it was easier to form a black-and-white judgement on what I see as abuses by the government, as I do not share the sentimental feelings Singaporeans may have of the PAP of the past. Not being a benefactor of the good the government may have done in the past, I experience little or no sense of divided loyalty when I assess the mistakes of the present administration. As a result of my interaction with the informants, my schema is aligned a bit more closely to how the local Singaporeans would view the memes.

3.2.1 Discussion on methods used

The focus changed as the investigation progressed, necessitating adjustments and variation in the method for each case study. While specific details are outlined at the beginning of each chapter, this section will outline and discuss the rationale, and some limitations of the methods chosen I encountered for each case.

3.2.1.1 *Methods in case study one*

The nature of the first case study relating to Singapore's SMRT transport company was exploratory and therefore less explicit in its methodological choices. The sudden rise of citizen generated satire was noted as a novel media phenomenon and the proliferation of online memes across various online sources provided ample material for a textual analysis. Frey, Botan & Kreps (1999) understand textual analysis as the method for describing and interpreting the characteristics of a message, either recorded or visual, and they are categorised as either transcripts of communication (i.e. verbatim recordings) or outputs of communication, which are the messages produced by communicators. As the data for this case study were drawn from the visual texts produced by netizens, they fall under the latter category.

The memes were circulated online on various social media platforms. As I was a resident of the ethnographic site, I recall receiving images of the breakdown on my Facebook Newsfeed. The viral memes caught the attention of the mainstream media and some of the images were reproduced in the newspapers and a short story was aired in the evening news. When this study was initiated later, the memes had to be retrieved and a Google Image search for "SMRT", "breakdown", "CEO" and "Saw Phaik Hwa" was used. Only images that I recall seeing on Facebook, the TV news and the newspaper during the initial viral period were selected for analysis. Pictures that were created and added much later were not chosen for analysis.

Early semiotic analyses, founded on the work of semioticians like Saussure (1915[1966]) and Peirce (1931), are based on language. However, language is seen today as but one system of signs and

semiotics now encompass “social life, group structure, beliefs, practices and the content of social relations as functionally analogous to the units that structure language” (Cullum-Swan & Manning, 1994, p. 466). This provides the basis for studying the images in the SMRT cases as texts where signs within were connected to the wider social events, ideas, practices and culture. The main series of memes, or visual texts, in this study was the netizens’ responses to the broken window news report in Figure 4.5. The netizens’ images were analysed for their content, their allusions to cultural objects and current events happening in Singapore. This method of analysis was useful for my purpose as I tried to use the netizen’s perspective to interpret the visual texts, which then takes into account the purpose for which the visual texts were created, the period in which they were created and the circumstances that shaped them, thereby allowing more reliable descriptions of the content, structure and functions of the messages within the texts. This in turn will show not just the technique for creating the memes but also narrative techniques used. Frey, Botan & Kreps (1999) describe this approach as rhetorical criticism as it allows a systematic way to evaluate the persuasive forces within the texts, aids in the understanding of the historical, social and cultural contexts and can be used as a form of social criticism to evaluate society.

One major limitation encountered using this approach is the uncertainty that the selection of the texts is sufficiently complete as to form a sound analysis as many of the texts were selected based on memory. This may be somewhat mitigated by the use of the memes curated by the blogs I drew from, and the assumption was made that the curators captured the most relevant memes at that time and included them in their collection.

3.2.1.2 Methods in case study two

Case two zoomed into a specific humour page, SGAG¹⁷. This was a dedicated site for the production and collation of socio-political memes driven by the current topics fervently debated at that time: The

¹⁷ A respected “brand” in Singapore, SGAG is an award winner and acknowledged leader in generating viral content by the social media industry (J. Yap, 2015). It has become a hugely popular humour site with a significant presence to Singapore Facebook users. At the time of writing it has 390,548 likes on its Facebook page, with 78.63% of its traffic derived from the domestic market (SimilarWeb, 2016).

Singapore government's White Paper for a population of 6.9 million. For this case study, a more systematic approach was required to break down the vast areas that could be studied into sensible, manageable sectors. For this, Anderson's (2012) media compass was used as a theoretical framework, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter (see 3.1). The compass divides the mediascape into "properties", "processes", "consequences" and "character".

The memes were, as with the first case study, analysed for their properties, which refers to the static data available. The simple statistics for the page and the posts—for instance the number of likes, comments, and so on—make them particularly suited for content analysis, which Frey et al. (1999) explain is useful for identifying, enumerating and analysing repeated occurrences of specific elements or characteristics with texts. This can be qualitative or quantitative. The statistical data were obtained from SGAG's Facebook page from 21 January until 8 February, the time period when the White Paper-related memes were posted and debated. These figures (Likes, Shares, Comments) were analysed for their correlation and provided snapshots of the structural properties of the page that reveal how popular certain posts are, the kind of sentiments that were provoked, the issues that viewers were passionate about, and so on.

The memes were semiotically analysed for the signs, signifiers and the various connotative and denotative functions. As a complete analysis of all 26 memes was impractical and probably not useful for the purpose of this research, the memes were reorganised according to their popularity as measured by the number of Comments they receive. Likes and Shares are equally valid measures of popularity but the Comments category was chosen because this thesis is interested in how the memes provoked or stimulate discourse among the netizens. From this hierarchy of popularity, only the top and bottom five memes were selected for semiotic analysis. Characteristics unique to each were identified in both the most popular as well as the least popular.

The comments themselves are limited in value for any academic exploration into the properties of the audience (such as their gender, ethnicity, and other demographics) as the identities of the commentators cannot be reliably verified. They are, however, useful material for both textual and

content analysis to determine the reasons for their reactions, thoughts and attitudes towards the images and the socio-political issues at hand. They formed the basis for understanding the relationship between the various stakeholders within the digital community and how the interactions make up Anderson's "processes", which refer to the dynamic relationship of the various parts to each other. The analysis of the comments was done by syntactic and thematic coding. The former refers to the process of noting discrete linguistic units recurring (for example, LOL and its variants), whilst the latter identifies the patterns within what were said, for example, agreeing, disagreeing, or joking. A limitation encountered in this process, common to all content analysis, is the interpretive and subjective nature of the coding. This is mitigated by the calibration of the ethnographic instrument, as I was part of the knowledge being produced in the case (see 3.1.2 Calibrating the ethnographic instrument). The analytical framework used to analyse the material has taken the analysis well beyond my response into an interpretative space that allows me to follow the understanding available in that culture. Because the comments were pithy and often lacking a broader context, I had to draw from my cultural competence to make sense of them. This pithiness is a feature of the way Singaporeans speak, which is what Hall (1976) would describe as "high-context", where the listener is expected to extrapolate and guess unspoken messages from the context of what is said. Comprehension is not possible unless one is an insider who understands the context and culture of the environment in which the utterances are made.

The comments are mined from an archive, and were several months old when I began my analysis, so verification for the information through interviews of the commentators was not practicable as there were too many commentators to contact for just a few short fragments of a broader conversation. Even if they were locatable, given the time lapse the commentators themselves are likely to have forgotten what they were thinking at the moment of the utterance. The lack of a practical way to obtain this verification constitutes one of the weaknesses of this study. However, for the verification of the interpretation of the semiotic analysis of the images, it was possible to directly contact the producer, in this case, SGAG Singapore. By establishing an understanding of the way they encode their images, it was possible to make a comparison between the intended message and the individual interpretations of the members of the community.

To understand the dynamics in the community of commentators, an interaction analysis was conducted. Frey et al. (1999) describes interaction analysis as the attempt to understand the knowledge required by participants in order to coordinate their behaviour with each other in a complex communicative situation. The interactional analysis in this case study focused on the functional nature of the comments exchanged and the purpose of the commentators' moves. This yielded some insight into the relationship between the commentators' moves in relation to each other. Some factors identified include affective orientation or tolerance of disagreement.

Semi-structured interviews were useful for clarifying my interpretations, as they rely on an open framework that allows for a conversational, two-way communication. As I was trying to establish a friendship with the SGAG owner, who goes by the pseudonym Barry Schmelly, using semi-structured interviews were less intrusive and I was able to build a relationship of trust with my informant. Subsequent to the interview, we remained in touch and have had several informal personal communications via Facebook messenger. Due to the personal and sensitive nature of the conversation, the text messages have not been included in the appendix of this thesis. Schmelly was also able to comment on my analysis when it was completed, and he provided insight into the quality, rigour and trustworthiness of my observations based on his perspective.

3.2.1.3 Methods in case study three

The third case study shifts the focus from Singapore to Malaysia. *Curi-curi Wang Malaysia* (CCWM), a Facebook humour page, is a site that I see as a Malaysian counterpart of SGAG due to many similar features¹⁸ and therefore afforded an understanding of the two sites alongside each other. As stated earlier, this is not so much to compare how the two are different, as understanding what the commonalities and contrasts in use of humour are that exist between the members from the two

¹⁸ The similar features, apart from the meme production techniques of watermarking and photoshopping of pictures, include the use of viral content strategies, for example, the focus on creating contents that the target audience relate easily to, a well-articulated story, keeping the content fresh by creating the unexpected and publishing content in a timely manner.

countries. The data are a series of memes collected by CCWM and reposted on their page for the purpose of mocking gaffes the Prime Minister made in a speech.

The memes, as visual texts, naturally invites a textual analysis approach. As this series of memes was targeting the powerful Prime Minister, the sub-category of Rhetorical Criticism was useful as a systematic means to describe, analyse, interpret and evaluate the persuasive force within the texts (Frey et al., 1999). Classical rhetorical tools, for example Aristotle's syllogism (consisting a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion), *enthymemes* (the omission of one of the three elements in the syllogism), Medhurst and DeSousa's (1981) literary *topoi*, dispositional forms, stases, *kategoria* and *apologia*, were all found to be useful for showing how the messages were shaped, conveyed and countered.

Content analysis lends itself well to the basic descriptive statistics provided by Facebook. Once again the Likes, Shares and number of Comments were used to identify the cycle of this particular media event. The data shed light on how humour is deployed in response to an issue but this was not given as much prominence in this study as the focus was on the practices rather than the metrics behind the dissemination and spread of the humour. The shift of focus in the methods used in this third case study, from looking at the interactional relationships among the various actors in SGAG, to looking more at the way messages were crafted in CCWM, was appropriate as the need to understand better how traditional strategies for political commentary is now updated in a digital form.

3.2.1.4 Methods in case study four

The final case study involving a video produced by a public figure, Teresa Kok, is different to the previous case studies as it is a departure from static images. Also, it is an important example of citizen satire being pushed past normal boundaries by a citizen who was also a Member of Parliament. This is of significance as the perceived conflict between her official parliamentary role and her status as an ordinary citizen with full rights to express her personal opinions produces new and unstable conditions in Malaysian politics. It also highlights the consequences of incurring the wrath of the public targets being satirized.

The main data was the satirical video itself, and the media compass once again proved to be useful for isolating the various components for study. Supplementary videos posted by Kok served as additional data that illuminated or expanded the meaning of the main satirical video, for example, the television interview she gave to alternative news site, KiniTV, or the recording of the altercation in parliament over her video. Each of these were posted on Kok's Facebook page, as well as on YouTube, and these statistical data were analysed for their correlation and contrasts. The number of Likes and Shares, for example, gave an indication of the wax and wane of the interest generated by each video that was posted between 24 Jan 2014 and 18 March 2014. Statistics of the same video but from her YouTube channel, were also considered and compared.

Content analysis was used to understand the comments made by Kok's followers. They were coded as expressing disapproval, approval, argumentative and so on.

The main visual text, Kok's *ONEderful* Malaysia CNY 2014 Video was given an in-depth analysis and its structure was broken into ten sections, with seven making up the main contents of the video. (The rest were functional sections, like the introduction and conclusion). The dialogue of the video was transcribed and textually analysed for themes and topics. Some of the rhetorical tools in case study three were redeployed to identify topoi and kategoria. A semiotic analysis of the visual elements revealed some of the signs used by Kok, for example, the connotative meaning of *feng shui* master character, Mrs Jit, her hairstyle, and her figure.

As a major point of contention around this video was the satire that was used, it was thought to be important to understand what technique of humour was being used by Kok. A textual analysis of the linguistic humour was done using Raskin's (1985) semantic humour framework.

I also met Kok and was granted an interview in which she justified her action and gave her reasons for producing the video. This interview was semi-structured so that she could share her thoughts and feelings freely. This allowed me not just to collect her responses but to gain some insight into Kok as a person, a politician and her passion. The comments by her followers on Facebook shed light on the viewers' attitude and feelings toward her, the video and the overall political climate. These were

analysed textually. Related news reports from various online sources were also drawn on to build the context of this particular media event as this provides the ethnographic framework within which I can understand the sentiments, frustrations and the motivation that drives citizens to satire.

3.3 General discussion

The disadvantages of using an ethnographical approach have been well-documented and this study is not spared from those issues (Domingo, 2003, p. 10). Gatson (2011) sees “the simultaneous dense interconnectedness of the Internet and the normal boundaries between networks and communities” as presenting a challenge, as data do not fit neatly within clearly demarcated margins. The problem of an abundance of data spilling over from various events at various sites has, this case study, been somewhat mitigated by discriminately choosing critical media events. Political humour sites, like news sites, produce material on a daily basis across many platforms. Bringing the study into focus required a judicious exercise of selectivity, which was how the cases were chosen – for their impact and/or the public interest of the issues. The overarching criterion for selecting my cases – the impact of the media events – is ascertained by the interest the posts in question generated and the extent the posts attracted the target audiences’ attention. Another indication of the impact is whether the mainstream or international media’s attention was drawn. This approach has implications as the cases were merely snapshots of an unceasing flow of events that are interconnected and the reader needs to be mindful that while this provides a huge amount of relevant and interesting findings the constraining parameters of this thesis makes it necessary to leave out all but the ones most relevant to the research question. Therefore, a degree of assumption has been made that gaps in prior knowledge of the cultural context, for example, local slangs or knowledge of local details, can be ignored.

Multiple socio-political humour sites exist in Malaysia and Singapore (see Table 3.1) and there are often overlaps in their posts although the coverage of topics is not always even. For example, Politicalgags¹⁹, a site similar to CCWM, only posted one meme on the *kangkung* issue on 13 January 2014, the same meme found in Figure 6.7 (see 6.3.2 Analysis of posts on 14 January 2014 (C7-C14)).

¹⁹ See <https://www.facebook.com/Politicalgag/?fref=nf>. The number of Likes at the time of writing stands at 91,344, which is significantly lower than CCWM’s 213,209, thus making it the smaller site. It was founded in 2012, a year later than CCWM.

CCWM has more likes (therefore, presumably, has a greater reach) and it sustained interest in the *kangkung* issue over a stretch of several days. With its more organised approach, CCWM was the logical choice for a case study. Similar considerations were made with the Singapore examples. SGAG was chosen as it was (and still is, at the time of writing) the largest socio-political humour Facebook page in Singapore. The *mrbrownshow*²⁰, although an older and more established socio-political commentary, uses audio podcasts on its blog as its primary medium (although occasionally YouTube videos are posted). Its Facebook presence is relatively new (2013) and has only 40,934 likes (compared to the 390,000 plus likes for SGAG). This thesis' focus on the visual automatically rules out *mrbrownshow*. Other viable sites include the Cartoon Press²¹, which has a modest Facebook following of 11,775 at the time of writing. The anonymous artists behind Cartoon Press produce high quality political cartoons in the old-style traditional with more intellectual content but the site's lower popularity makes it a less significant object to study. Also, its publicity shy creator(s) have not given permission for more in-depth probing into their workings behind the scene. On the other end of the spectrum is *Demon-cratic*²², a strongly anti-establishment satirical online comic strip belonging to Leslie Chew. At the time of writing he has 41,629 followers on Facebook. Being self-taught Chew relies on comic-generating software to create his work. I met informally with Chew several times in December 2013. In contrast to Cartoon Press, Chew had no inhibition sharing what he does and what he believes in. It was his opinion that Cartoon Press, *Demon-cratic* and SGAG cover the different audience types, with CP catering to the more intellectual, SGAG, the middle ground and his *Demon-cratic*, speaking more to the working class. Although his sharing provided many interesting insights that informed my analysis of the two Singapore cases, I decided his straight-forward one-man operation did not have sufficient scale for a full case study. A summary of my conversation with Chew has been included in the Appendix: Leslie Chew –*Demon-cratic*. Chew (personal communication, 7 February 2016) discontinued his satirical comic out of disappointment after the

²⁰ See www.mrbrownsnow.com.

²¹ See <http://www.facebook.com/thecartoonpress>.

²² See <http://demon-cratic.com/>

incumbent PAP government was returned to power with a stronger majority in the 2015 General Election.

While the cases selected for this thesis provided empirical data on the impact of these viral memes, the evidence is limited as the resulting consequences are generally due to multiple factors and cannot be conclusively attributed to the memes alone. The data on the interactional relationship between the actors are strong but because there are no reliable records of meme creators or the commentators that can shed light on who they really are, generalising is somewhat difficult. Due to practical and ethical constraints, the inability to interview the meme creators, particularly in the SMRT and kangkung cases, means authorial intention cannot be conclusively determined. This may appear to be a deficiency but arguments exist that this situation is not always undesirable²³. In contrast, authorial intention was easily ascertained through interviews with SGAG and Teresa Kok, and it was found that their assessment of their own work was biased as anticipated, as they will naturally provide their version of the story in the best possible light in their own favour. This bias is nonetheless acceptable as this study approaches the data with a clear assumption that political humour will be used mostly for political ends by the disenfranchised or marginalised anyway and thus is not in conflict with the objective of the study, which is to understand how these groups of people use political humour to achieve their goals rather than which side of the political divide the memes are on.

²³ Refer to discussion on authorial intent in 2.3.2.3 *Literary satire* and how much importance should be given to it.

4 Case study one: Burgeoning citizen satire and Singapore's SMRT

The first case study of this thesis highlights the sudden rise of a media phenomenon in Singapore when members of the public took to social media to express, using humorous texts, their outrage at a Singapore public transport provider (SMRT), after a series of major breakdowns of the mass rapid train crippled their primary means for getting to and from work, school and for everyday general commuting. This spontaneous participation by ordinary members of the public to openly express anger and indignation in public, albeit online, has not been reported in living memory in Singapore and therefore deserves scholarly attention. Singapore society, as explained in chapter one, is generally inexpressive in public due to a culture of fear that has cloaked the country since independence. This is more so in Singapore than in its counterpart, Malaysia. While it may be excessive to attribute the eventual resignation of the SMRT CEO directly to the memes, this chapter shows that these memes nevertheless contributed to the pressure that eventually held the troubled CEO accountable. Her resignation was a victory for the ordinary citizens of Singapore and I argue marked a turning point in how politics are negotiated in the authoritarian state. It also lends further credence to the argument for the growth of multiple public spheres that are emerging on the Internet (Dahlgren, 1995; Lunt & Livingstone, 2013; Papacharissi, 2002). While SMRT is not a government agency, it is government-linked, and the removal of the CEO as a result of pressure from the public is exceptional and served to embolden the citizens, as we will see in this as well as chapter 5. The humorous memes galvanised disparate groups and individuals, and the weakened fear possibly marked the beginning of the return of a measure of power to the citizens. This chapter, based on my earlier article published in the *European Journal of Humour* (Chen, 2013), documents and highlights some preliminary observations that support the argument that there are important and significant changes taking place in the socio-political arena as a result of the growth of Internet and social media use. It provides a snapshot of the health of a society and tests Hammett (2010) and Davies' (2007) notion of humour as a barometer or thermometer of society. Data are sourced from the Internet, newspaper reports, and comments posted by media audiences online. Central to the thesis of this chapter are the two over-arching questions of this entire research project:

why is satire being used by citizens and how does it impact civic discourse? This chapter will primarily explore the techniques used to produce the funnies, some possible motivations behind these visual satirical creations and how the observable impact of these memes was effected.

4.1 Singapore and the media

As outlined in chapter one (see 1.3 “The restricted media of Malaysia and Singapore”) Singapore has strict media control, an iron grip on the mainstream media and zero tolerance for any form of spontaneous public protest. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Singapore at 135th position²⁴ behind neighbours Malaysia (122nd) and Brunei (125th) but ahead of Thailand (137th) and Indonesia (146th) on media freedom (Reporters Without Borders 2011). On January 12, 2009, Human Rights Watch reported the arrest of a two-man demonstration in Singapore for “protesting against what they say is unfair treatment of Singapore-based Burmese nationals who took part in a mass demonstration in front of the Burmese embassy here last year during their country's vote on a constitutional referendum”. This arrest prompted deputy Asia director, Phil Robertson, to describe the tiny city-state as “a textbook example of a politically repressive state” (“Singapore: ‘Textbook Example’ of Repressive State,” 2010).

The received interpretation of Singapore politics states that citizens happily trade freedom of speech for a country and society where “things...work” (Chang, 2011). Within just several decades after its independence from its British colonial master, Singapore had emerged as a thriving, modern, wealthy and cosmopolitan nation. “A study of the world's economies has shown that Singapore had the highest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the world in 2010” (J. Lim, 2012) However, Singapore appears to have fallen victim to its own success, as it is now the wealthier and more educated segment of the population, the very people nurtured by the government’s progressive policies in education, who are increasingly critical of key governmental policies. Their list of grouses encompasses a wide range of issues such as the rising cost of healthcare; a pressure-cooker education system that stresses its students with multiple exams and at the same time stifles creativity and critical thinking; the lack of transparency in how taxpayers’ money is managed, for example the Central Provident Fund; the

²⁴ Statistics released by RSF in 2016 showed it occupies a much lower 154th position at the time of writing. Malaysia too has dropped to 146th, Brunei to 155th, while Thailand at 136th and Indonesia at 130th have shown improvement.

excessive salary of the Prime Minister, which is “the highest salary of any elected head of government in the world—more than four times as much as Barack Obama and David Cameron”, as well as that of his Cabinet (“Singapore backlash against political pay rates despite cut,” 2012); the rising public housing prices and shortage of new homes for first-time homeowners; as well as an overcrowded public transportation system that is groaning under the weight of a liberal immigration policy that has brought in *en masse* what the government labels as “foreign talents”, and which has resulted in native Singaporeans being reduced from 80.3 per cent in 2001²⁵ to 63 per cent of the total population (“Monthly Digest of Statistics Singapore,” 2012). What some would describe as “cracks” within the society (C. M. Loh, 2007) has led to the PAP—the dominant and the only ruling party Singapore has known since its independence in 1969—to an embarrassing general election in February 2011 where it suffered a drop of 6.5 per cent in votes. Although numerically small, this drop is tantamount to a significant slap in the face of the authoritarian group²⁶ (“Country Comparison,” 2011).

A contributing factor to the government’s poorer performance is likely to have been the attitudes of younger, increasingly bolder, and more vocal netizens who pose a sharp contrast to the loyal, docile and politically apathetic older generation who feel that they owe their current well-being to the efforts of the PAP in the past. The younger generation may be positioned much further from the reasons the older generation has for their sense of indebtedness to the PAP for and may not share the same sentiment. The *Wall Street Journal* noted this shift, reporting that “[a]lthough Singapore has long had a reputation for limited press freedoms, a thriving online media market has emerged recently, with blogs and other websites taking shots at elected officials and stirring up debate on a range of social and political issues in the wealthy city-state” (Mahtani, 2012).

4.2 Political humour in Singapore

Editorial cartoons’ exclusion from the mainstream media is a function of the intentionally ambiguous and often arbitrary out-of-bounds (OB marker) concept mentioned earlier that came into explicit form

²⁵ This figure is derived from figures published by the Singapore Department of Statistics (Yeow Lip, 2002, p. 2)

²⁶ The PAP has won every seat since Singapore’s Independence until 1981 when Opposition politicians gained a foothold in parliament from 1984 onwards even though the PAP continued to hold the majority of seats. The 2011 election was significant as it saw the most number of seats contested since independence. It was also the year the PAP lost for the first time a Group Representation Constituency (GRC), an electoral division where the Members of Parliament are elected into Parliament as a group (Elections Department, 2016).

in 1994 as a result of a public altercation between political commentator Catherine Lim and the then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (T. Lee, 2002, p. 109). Making fun of political leaders was described by ex-PM Goh as disrespectful and has the effect of undermining people's confidence in the government, which was unacceptable in a "Confucianist 'Asian context'" (B. H. Chua, 1994). However, the *Washington Post* noted that nevertheless "[p]olitical humour is playing a bigger role than ever in the city-state, and despite [the] government's insistence that politics is no laughing matter, satirical websites are blossoming" (De Clercq, 2006). On the other hand, the *Washington Post* also observed that, aside from Colin Goh, former lawyer turned writer, satirist, cartoonist and founder of the *mrbrown* show, "others do not want to reveal their identities, they are too scared" which underscores the climate of fear that continues to exist.

August 2006 was a coming-out of sorts for the closet political humourist when TalkingCock.com, the leading satirical website chalked a milestone by holding "its first spoken word 'live event'" ("the *mrbrown* show (video): TalkingCock in Parliament, Hossan Leong," 2006), where radio DJ, actor and comedian Hossan Leong sang and recorded a satirical account of Singapore's history from its birth to the present day. The humorous song, which contained some barbs aimed at the government and even a few for the first Prime Minister and strongman Lee Kuan Yew, raised many a nervous eyebrow. To the surprise of many, no sanctions were taken against the organisers, which led to Asian Correspondent's suggestion that Leong was able to get away with "breaking such taboos" by

...adopting the role played by court jesters in England during the Middle Ages. While the people were forbidden from speaking ill of the monarchy – sometimes on pain of death – the jesters were allowed free reign [sic] to mock and parody because it was accepted that anything they said was "in jest" and that they were merely the court fool.

(Bland, 2009, p. 120)

The lack of any punitive action against Leong may be a significant marker of the change in attitude Singaporeans have towards the return to the use of humour. Emboldened by Leong's example, it is likely that the climate of fear that used to blanket the country is no longer as frightening to a post-Lee Kuan Yew generation of political observers and commentators.

4.3 SMRT

The subject of the present case study, SMRT Corporation Ltd, is the major operator of Singapore's main intra-city railway network, known by the abbreviation MRT (Mass Rapid Transit). It also owns a large fleet of public buses and taxis. Although it is government-assisted and its fare structure is regulated by the Public Transport Council, it is a publicly-listed and profit-based company. SMRT is the second largest public transportation company. In land-scarce Singapore, where car ownership is actively and forcefully discouraged through the imposition of extremely high taxes and a host of overwhelming disincentives, the general population is highly dependent on the services of primarily the MRT in addition to the public bus network and taxis. Incorporated in 1987, it had a track record of being extremely reliable with no notable major breakdowns for the last 20 years; something Singaporeans have taken great pride in and taken for granted, as will be shown through the analysis of the relevant case studies. This case study tracks the sudden turn of events when the company suffered a massive loss of the public's confidence due to a series of major breakdowns and public relations faux pas, which fired the rise of a form of socio-political satire and online humour on a scale hitherto unseen in Singapore. This was accomplished by just a small group of people who were able to shape the public's perception to the point of pressuring the Chief Executive Officer to take the unprecedented step of resigning from her post.

This is an important case study for several reasons. Firstly, Singaporeans do not have a culture of going on record to criticise those in authority, especially not through the media. Although SMRT is a publicly-listed company, it is perceived as a part of the government due to its many key leaders with links to the government. The forceful online assault by ordinary citizens on a public figure, especially one closely associated with the corridors of power is uncommon. Secondly, the culture of management in Singapore has always been top-heavy, be it in the corporate or the public sector. Decisions made at the top level hardly ever take input from the lower ranks into consideration. So any effort by the lower hierarchy to influence decisions made higher up is highly unusual. That the CEO of SMRT gave in to pressure for no other observable reasons than the online attack indicates a significant site of study into understanding how ordinary Singaporeans engaged with socio-political issues using the online platform, and through

the use of socio-political humour. This engagement had taken the form of YouTube videos, satirical writings, parodies and Internet memes. For the latter, the use of the political cartoons framework for analysis will be useful for understanding aspects of this newer medium of political commentary. Where the functions of political Internet memes and political cartoons overlap, there are, I argue, common features that support the supposition that these memes are a remediation of the political cartoon. In this case study, the Internet meme becomes the unit of analysis.

4.3.1 Data collection

When the first major breakdown occurred, I was among those affected by the disruption as my train home from the city centre was cancelled and I had to find some other means to get home. The SMRT breakdown memes were soon circulated widely on the Internet and I recall friends sharing them on their Facebook newsfeed. I also recall watching a short news story on the humorous memes on the television news.

As discussed in the methods section in 3.2.1.1 Case study one: textual analysis the memes for this study had to be collected at a date much later after the incident and the texts were acquired through a Google Image search, using keywords like “SMRT”, “breakdown”, “CEO” and “Saw Phaik Hwa”. As new images had been added after the initial breakdown²⁷ I selected only the images from the search that I could recall seeing during that early period in December 2011. By clicking on the images that I found I was able to trace the source of those images. There were also images that I remember seeing right after the incident but they could not be found through Google search. Presumably, they have been removed by their creators.

4.3.2 SMRT woes

The rock solid confidence of the public that the transport operator had been enjoying for many years could not have been shaken by just a single event. Instead, it had taken a series of incidents to erode the

²⁷ A wikipedia page has been set up to chronicle the breakdowns since the first that occurred in December 2011. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Singapore_MRT_disruptions.

public's faith in them; incidents that included a couple of serious security breaches, vandalism, the increasingly overcrowded trains, the aforementioned breakdowns, as well as some minor incidents involving its bus and taxi subsidiaries, which are outside of this case study's scope.

4.3.2.1 Vandalism

On two occasions – once on 17 May 2010 and again on 17 Aug 2011– vandals breached the supposedly high security of SMRT's depot and spray-painted elaborate graffiti art on several train coaches (Suparto, 2010; Teoh, 2011). Since the September 11 terrorist attack in New York, Singapore too had been on high security alert and Singaporeans have been bombarded with public service announcements to be constantly vigilant. These include messages put up by none other than SMRT itself via its announcement screens in all its stations and over the public address system on their trains. Commuters were continually reminded to be on the lookout for “suspicious looking persons or articles”, which should be immediately reported. This high level of fear is not unfounded, as the US-friendly island-state is indeed deemed as a real, potential target for an act of terrorism and Singaporeans were conditioned to have a heightened sensitivity to potential terrorist threats (Hussain, 2015). When the vandalised trains were reported there was shocked disbelief and indignation.

Insult was added to injury because the vandalised train (see Figure 4.1) remained in service for two whole days before the alarm was raised and even then only after members of the public posted pictures and videos of the decorated coaches online (AsiaOne, 2011c). An unverified online rumour suggested that staff members who saw the graffiti did not report it because they had assumed it to be part of some artwork for a publicity campaign or advertisement as there had been in the past. This further fuelled the perception of poor internal communication within the organisation.



Figure 4.1: The vandalised train. Source: (Dogmannsteinberg, 2011).

4.3.2.2 *Overcrowding*

Singapore's liberal immigration policy had led to a sudden influx of foreigners entering the country to work and live. In 2010 alone a total of 29,265 people were granted permanent residence status and 18,758 granted citizenship ("MRT breaks down again," 2011). The effects of this policy were felt most keenly by the commuter. Tempers frayed and patience wore thin when Singaporeans, unaccustomed to fighting for space during their daily commute, found themselves increasingly having to battle a sea of people in overcrowded trains and buses (K. Lim, 2011; Ministry of Transport, 2012; W. H. Tan, 2011). With the large in-flow of immigrants came problems precipitated by social and cultural differences in habits and practices between the outsiders and the locals. Although it was not responsible for this invasion of foreigners, angry commuters nevertheless directed their frustration at the transport company for not taking measures to anticipate and alleviate the situation by providing more frequent train services and by expanding the infrastructure. The Chief Executive of SMRT, Saw Phaik Hwa, was famously reported to have remarked that "people can board the train – it's whether they choose to", which further enraged certain citizens, prompting blogger-artist, Cheong (2011) to post one of the earlier memes on the topic, that posed her statement as a rhetorical question (Figure 4.2).

Following that first meme, another in the form of a parody motivational poster, mocked as demotivational posters by some online users, like the one in Figure 4.3, was released. It framed Saw's

remark as a parody of sage advice. Saw in her personal blog subsequently defended herself and asserted that she was quoted out of context.

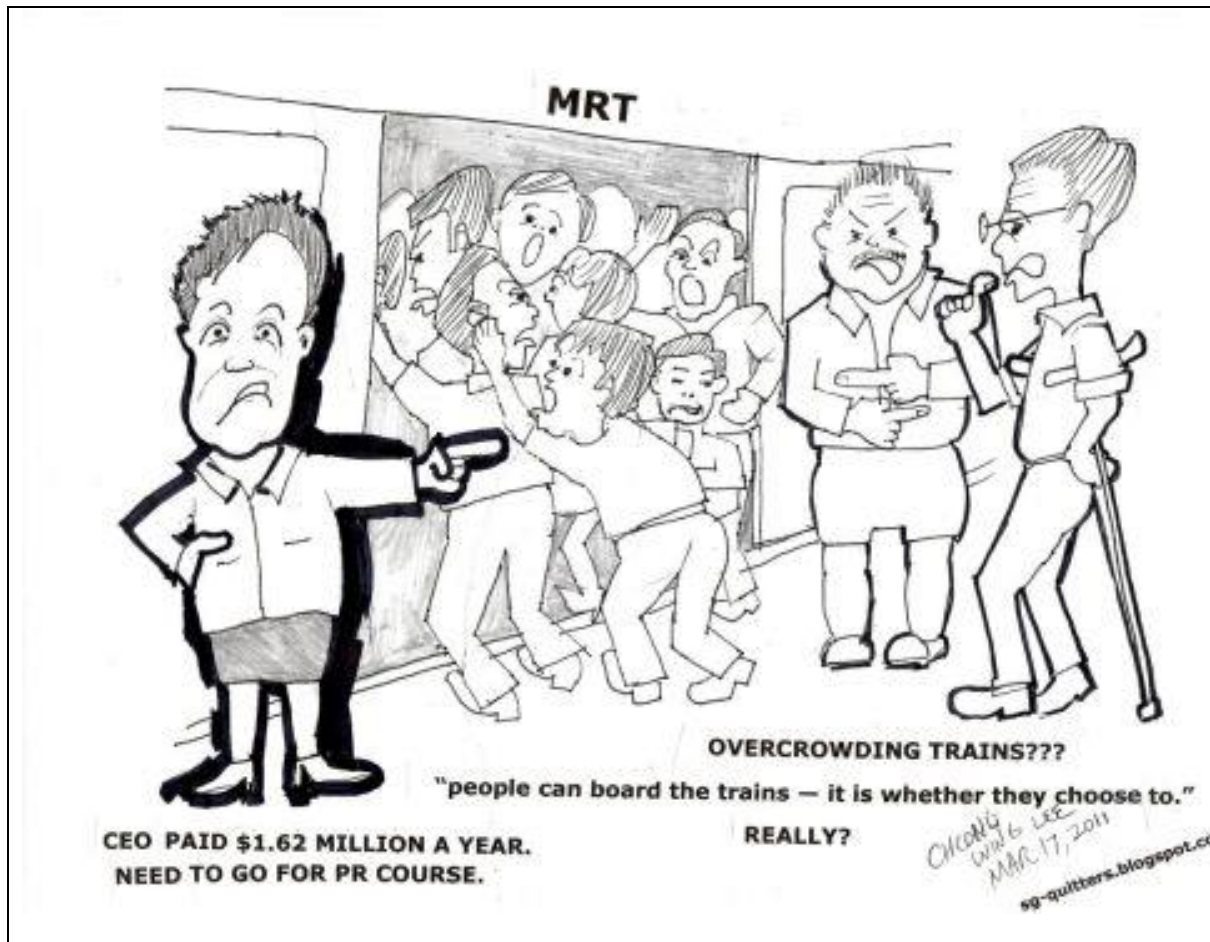


Figure 4.2: MRT overcrowding and CEO's "stupid remarks" ("Reporters Without Borders: Malaysia," 2013).



Figure 4.3: A demotivational poster parodying SMRT CEO Saw's quote ("Reporters Without Borders: Singapore," 2013).

4.3.2.3 *Train breakdowns*

Events took a major turn when on December 2011 two breakdowns that crippled the transportation system occurred within two days of each other, leaving thousands of commuters stranded (Saad, 2011). This was then followed by more minor breakdowns, which continued to disrupt train travel ("MRT breaks down again," 2011). The timing of these major breakdowns was particularly unfortunate for SMRT as the transport company, together with other operators, had just successfully applied to the Land Transport Authorities (LTA) for an increase in their fare several months earlier amidst fierce objection online. This increase "of 1 percent will mean that the transport operators stand to gain \$15 million in extra revenue" (Mokhtar, 2011). Commuters felt the increase was unjustified as the company had already been posting extremely healthy profits while the quality of service they had been providing was perceived as either stagnant or deteriorating. One anonymous blogger noted that SMRT's percentage of profit after tax against revenue from 2006 until 2010 has been consistently high, making

SMRT “8.3 times more profitable than SIA²⁸” (Singapore Election, 2011). The blogger’s analysis is represented in Table 4.1.

Year	Profit in percentage
2006	14.5 per cent,
2007	18.2 per cent,
2008	18.7 per cent,
2009	18.5 per cent,
2010	18.2 per cent

Table 4.1: SMRT Profit in percentage of revenue from 2006-2010 (Singapore Election, 2011).

4.3.3 Public relations faux pas

On 14 December 2011, when yet another breakdown occurred during the morning rush hour, actor-singer-DJ Hossan Leong, immediately reported it on his morning radio show, advising his listeners to find alternative means to get to work. His information was based on comments received in his Twitter account. However, he was immediately “censured for announcing the disruption to the Circle Line train services” because “his announcement came before an official statement was released by SMRT” (Cai, 2011). Fans and sympathisers of Leong were angered by the high-handed attitude of the authorities (it is not known if the censure was from SMRT or the radio station itself) that they perceived as having been not only unhelpful in alleviating the woes of the travellers as they did not provide timely announcements and travel advice, but now they are taking an unduly hard stance against a helpful, well-meaning person who stepped in to fill in the information gap that they authorities created. (Tweets have been reproduced here unedited.)

allthatjazz, on December 15, 2011 at 1:20 am said:

the truth is now obvious for even a blind man (that 60 per cent of voters) to see — SMRT sucks at communication big-time, both verbally and on the rails. and they dare boast about having a good train system and criticise others.

²⁸ SIA is Singapore Airlines, the national flight carrier and pride of the nation.

at the same time, whoever made the hullabaloo about hossan's annct shows a total lack of respect for commuters and has taken control of the media to new heights. what arrogance... and utter stupidity.

Richard, on December 16, 2011 at 9:48 am said:

Yeah, we would need to wait for an official statement from SMRT while people are gropping in the darkness on a train without ventilation.

The immediate general reaction was to spread jokes online targeting SMRT, and this was primarily in the form of comments and postings in Facebook and Twitter (Sammyboy, 2011).

When a train broke down again in the evening of 15 December passengers of the stranded train were stuck in the tunnel for close to an hour. Passengers alleged that the train driver did not know what to do and they had had to remain in a carriage that had no lights or ventilation as the power had been cut (E.-J. Ng, 2011). After some time, some passengers were reported to have experienced difficulty in breathing which prompted one male passenger to make the drastic decision of breaking a glass window of the door with a fire extinguisher (AsiaOne, 2011a; Sim, 2011). Photos of the conditions in the train during that episode taken by passengers using their smartphones were circulated almost immediately. However, SMRT subsequently denied that the trains had no power and countered the news by insisting, against the photo evidence online (Figure 4.4), that "passengers affected by Thursday's train breakdown should not have been gasping for air or been plunged into darkness even if they were trapped in a stalled train" because "[w]hen a train loses its power and stops on the tracks, an emergency power system should kick in" (N. Tan, 2011).



Figure 4.4: A photograph posted by a passenger trapped in the tunnel during the breakdown (N. Tan, 2011).

SMRT subsequently issued an advisory urging commuters to “never smash the windows or force the doors open” ("Singapore's Election 'Watershed' May Loosen Political Hold of Lee's Party," 2011). The advisory ended with the statement “He [the man who broke the window] should not have done so but considering the situation, he will not be penalised, SMRT officials said” (ibid). This earned SMRT further ridicule from Twitter users like @benjubby 17 Dec 2011, 9pm: “Yea right. Like you just expect us to wait till we die” ("Singapore's Election 'Watershed' May Loosen Political Hold of Lee's Party," 2011).

4.3.4 Netizens' responses

In a burst of spontaneous creativity and to a certain extent boldness seldom seen in Singapore, (although most of the perpetrators nevertheless felt the need to remain anonymous), netizens seized upon a photograph published by The Straits Times Online of the broken window (see Figure 4.5) to express their ire.

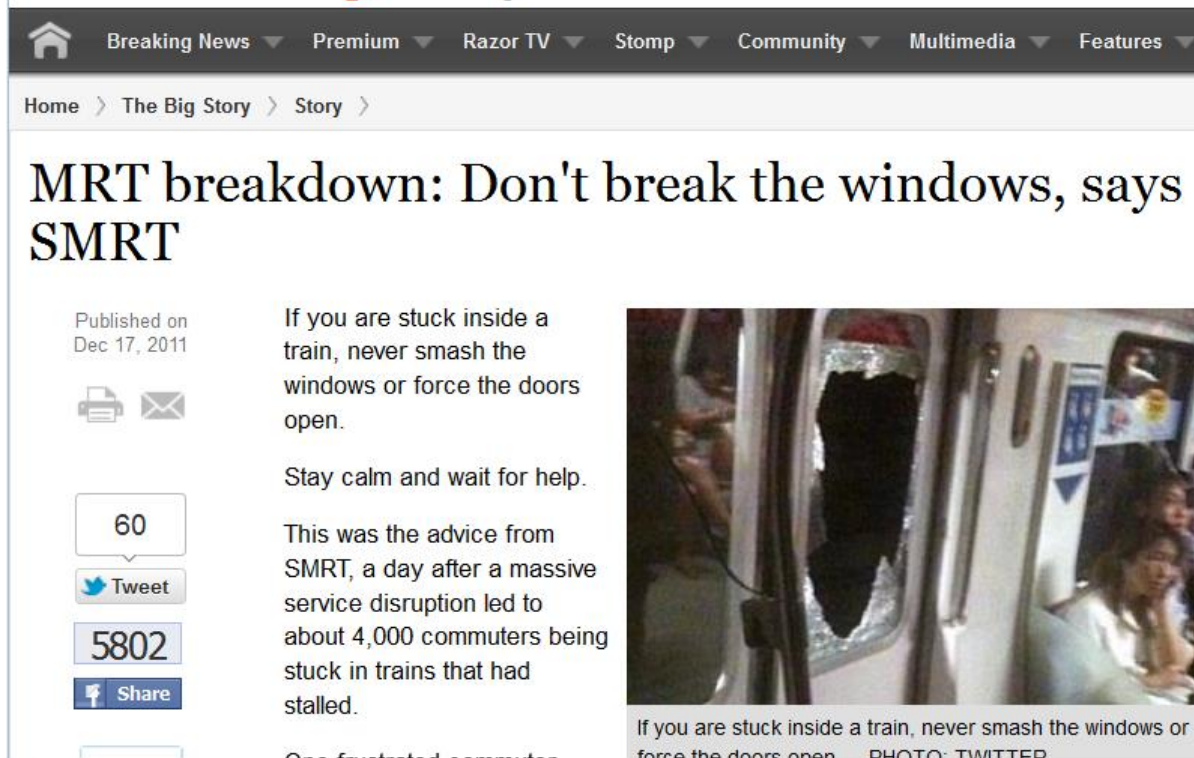


Figure 4.5: Screenshot of the original photo of broken window ("Singapore's Election 'Watershed' May Loosen Political Hold of Lee's Party," 2011).

By manipulating the photo digitally images were added to depict ridiculous explanations for the broken windows (see Figure 4.6a to 4.6f). The technique used for these pictures is a simple superimposition of another image upon the original:

4.6a "Angry Bird" (cloudywindz, 2011)

4.6b "Alien" from the movie of the same name (Kang, 2011)

4.6c "Sadako" from the Japanese horror film "The Ring" (cloudywindz, 2011)

4.6d Abercrombie and Fitch male clothing model²⁹ (Stomp Straits Times, 2011).

4.6e Leonidas from the movie "300" (AsiaOne, 2011b)

²⁹ Taken from the recent controversial launch of the company's Singapore outlet where a giant poster of a naked male torso hung outside its new building offended the sensibilities of certain quarters and had to be taken down. During the launch topless male models cavorted with the customers who queued in long lines to have their picture taken together.

4.6f The Incredible Hulk (Kang, 2011)



a)



b)



c)



d)



Figure 4.6a to 4.6f: Netizen's doctored photographs of the broken window.

A couple of memes used a slightly different technique. One was a parody of SMRT's own publicity poster (Figure 4.6g).



Figure 4.6g: A parody of SMRT's promotional poster.

Figure 4.6h is a parody of *Time Magazine* suggesting that the person who broke the window ought to be hailed a hero instead of SMRT's suggestion that he was a vandal.



Figure 4.6h: Parody cover of Time's person of the year.

CEO Saw Phaik Hwa quickly became the target of scorn. A demotivational poster, a parody of the motivational poster, depicted her issuing a challenge à la fictitious character Dirty Harry's "go ahead, make my day" to the public to break her windows. It was framed in typical Singapore colloquial English: "Break my MRT window. Break *lo*. I increase fare only, wahaha!" (Figure 4.7a). The Singlish article *lo*, more normally spelled as *lor*, is borrowed from Cantonese and functions as a marker to denote resignation or dismissiveness. Another demotivational poster (Figure 4.7b) labelled her as an outright failure. An unusual feature of this so-called demotivational poster is that it addresses the image, rather than audience, which seems to suggest that the creator does not understand the rules of the genre, or, alternatively, it could be argued that the creator is changing the rules.



Figure 4.7a: Demotivational poster depicting CEO Saw challenging the public to break her train windows (Anonymous_X, 2011).



Figure 4.7b: SMRT CEO Saw Phaik Hwa labelled as a failure (I.Z. Reloaded, 2011).

At Hong Lim Park, Singapore's government-sanctioned speaker's corner, a group had gathered to call for the CEO's resignation ("SMRT president in the hot seat," 2011). One poster held up by the protesters

had a clever wordplay on the SMRT abbreviation “SMRT: Saw Must Resign Today” (Figures 4.8a & 4.8b). The photograph of this poster was quickly circulated on the Internet.



Figure 4.8a: Saw Must Resign Today ("SMRT president in the hot seat," 2011).



Figure 4.8b: A group of protester at Hong Lim Park, expressing their displeasure at the SMRT service interruptions. (Source: Unknown)

Saw, however, resisted the suggestion and in a press conference stated that “she has no plans to step down over the disruptions” because in her opinion “being responsible does not mean walking away, instead it means doing all she can to get the problem fixed” (“Singapore General Elections 2011-2012: Watershed or Watertight?,” 2011). This announcement immediately drew more criticisms online, with some portraying her as a ruthless corporate tyrant bent on keeping her high paying job. A photo of a past Egyptian-themed SMRT corporate annual dinner, in which Saw was carried on a sedan chair by a group of topless young men, found its way to the Internet (Figure 4.9a) and immediately went viral. Soon after, the theme was picked up by other Internet users who, again using image manipulation, depicted her as Cleopatra lording over her minions (Figure 4.9b).



Figure 4.9a: The SMRT Egyptian themed annual dinner photograph (Liang & Tan, 2011).



Figure 4.9b: Saw depicted as a slave-driving tyrant ("Reporters Without Borders: Malaysia," 2013).

One anonymous user then created a template from this annual dinner photograph and placed it on ImageShack (n.d.) to be made available for anyone who wished to create their own version of the image. (The link has since expired but the template can be viewed in Figure 4.9c.)



Figure 4.9c: SMRT annual dinner template (Chooi, 2011).

Many users then superimposed the template onto various scenarios, beginning with the obvious one of Saw touring Egypt (in line with the Cleopatra theme), gradually leading to more and more bizarre examples, as exemplified by the images listed here:

Figure 4.10a: Saw visiting the pyramids.

Figure 4.10b: Saw escaping the inconvenience of the MRT breakdown.

Figure 4.10c: Saw gloating over the “peasants” (i.e. the commuters) who have to queue for the emergency shuttle buses during the breakdown, unlike the minority who can afford their own private modes of transportation.³⁰

Figure 4.10d: Saw being carried through the MRT tunnel, leading the commuters in their evacuation.³¹

Figure 4.10e: Saw inspecting the MRT tunnel.

Figure 4.10f: Saw inspecting the graffiti on the trains. This picture alludes to the security lapse that occurred the several months ago.

³⁰ Singaporeans perceive a widening social gap between what Fong (2012) labels as the “elites” and the “peasants”. They likely feel the “elites” do not empathise with their daily inconvenience and struggles.

³¹ It was reported that commuters who were stuck in the trains for up to an hour were upset that they had to make a trip out of the trains onto the tracks to access the station.

Figure 4.10g: Saw touring the shopping district of Orchard Road.³²

Figure 4.10h: Saw inspecting Kim Jong Il's body. The North Korea leader died on Dec 17, the same day as one of the breakdowns (Williams, 2011).

Figure 4.10i: Saw recruiting the teddy bear-like Ewoks from the Star Wars movie to make the repairs.

Figure 4.10j: Saw evading the road tolls (ERP) of Singapore's expressways in her sedan chair. The allusion is to the government's justification of prohibitively high taxes for cars and a road usage toll to force Singaporeans to use public transportation instead.

Figure 4.10k: Saw inspecting the SMRT buses (A. Lim, 2011). This picture alludes to an incident that occurred around the time of the MRT breakdown when a new bus driver was directed by the control station to divert to a different route to avoid a massive traffic jam. The driver, unfamiliar with the roads outside of his standard route got lost, resulting in the passengers being treated to a two-hour unsolicited joyride. Strict regulations prohibited the driver from allowing passengers to disembark anywhere other than the bus stops designated for the route service.

Figure 4.10l: Saw walking to the edge of a waterfall with the caption "Final Destination", the name of a series of movies of the same name, possibly symbolically predicting her career's demise or worse.

Figure 4.10m: The humour makes a poetic full circle back to the first broken window meme with Angry Birds. The caption suggested that Saw angered the Angry Birds, which was why one was projected through the window.

³² This can be interpreted as a swipe at her high paying job and lavish lifestyle, and also her background in the retail sector. Critics attributed the SMRT failure to her appointment as CEO because she was formerly the CEO of DFS, a retailer of luxury goods, which targets travellers (J. Tan, 2012) and has no engineering qualification or experience in running a transportation company.

Figure 4.9c: The original template.



Figure 4.10a. Saw visiting Egypt.

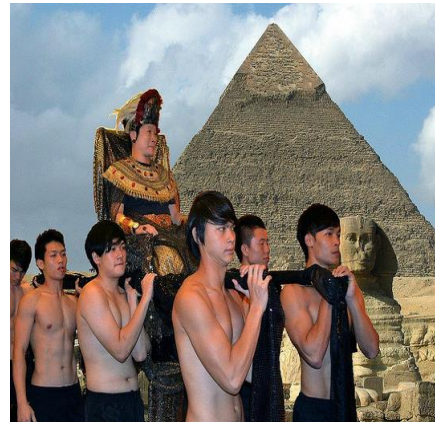


Figure 4.10b: “Train Disruption? It's okay, if you have your own entourage of muscled slaves to carry you around”.



Figure 4.10c: “Inspecting poor peasants who have to queue to board SMRT shuttle buses after train breakdown”.



Figure 4.10d: “Embarking on a SMRT tunnel walk”.



Figure 4.10e: “Inspecting SMRT tunnel”.



Figure 4.10f: “Inspecting the beautiful free graffiti on SMRT train”.



Figure 4.10g: “Shopping at Orchard Road”.



Figure 4.10h: “Inspecting Kim Jong Il's dead body”.



Figure 4.10i: “Recruiting Ewoks to repair SMRT trains”.



Figure 4.10j: “The best mode of transport to evade ERP”.



Figure 4.10l: “Final Destination”.



Figure 4.10k: “Inspecting SMRT buses to ensure the drivers know their bus routes”.



Figure 4.10m: “How Saw made the Angry Birds angry...”.



Figures 4.9c – 4.10 m: Samples of the Internet memes mocking Saw, CEO of SMRT (Chooi, 2011; A. Lim, 2011).

Despite her earlier words of defiance and denial of the possibility of resigning, less than a week after the New Year she capitulated and announced her resignation in January 2012 ("SMRT CEO Saw Phaik Hwa resigns," 2012).

4.3.5 Discussion

The SMRT debacle is both interesting and unique for a number of reasons. Singaporeans are normally politically placid and unwilling to express their unhappiness in public, and this had resulted in a culture that privileges swallowing one's socio-political misery in order to live and let live. Part of the reason for this is because the general public have hitherto not had any real access to the public sphere. Habermas (1999, pp. 1-2) understood the word “public” as one which has evolved over time and is very

much dependent on the context of the word in use and therefore when “we call events and occasions ‘public’ they imply that they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs. The expression ‘public building’ need not refer to general accessibility as the building does not have to be open to the public traffic.” This is particularly descriptive of the Singapore public sphere where publicness is colonised by the mainstream media controlled by the government. The use of “public sphere” in Singapore does not have much affinity to the common meaning of public as in public opinion or public outrage. Today’s media scholars (Castells, 2008; Gimmmler, 2001; Papacharissi, 2002) are monitoring closely the promise of the Internet to provide additional alternative public spheres that are not in any single group’s control over public debate but ones that are truly public in the common sense that could possibly transcend local, regional and even national boundaries, and where negotiation of power relationships can take place between the disparate voices of the various stakeholders of any particular issue. This Singapore example suggests a nascent movement towards this direction, albeit in tiny increments.

The lack of access to a public space notwithstanding, during the rare times when discontent boils over and when members of the Singapore public try to make their voices heard, it is not known in recent memory to have progressed to the point of reaching the intensity where demand for punishment or retribution is made, as exemplified by this episode. This stands in sharp contrast against the Singaporean political culture of hesitancy to argue back, a culture that is well illustrated a few years earlier when the Opposition Leader Low Thia Khiang no less, in parliament fell short of calling for the resignation of the then Deputy Prime Minister. The DPM, who also held the Home Affairs portfolio, was ultimately responsible for the scandalous escape of terrorist suspect, Mas Selamat from police custody. This incident is an important reference point that underscores the magnitude of the problem, and the anger of the public as well as their fear of challenging the government despite their dissatisfaction. The entire country had been turned into a large hunting ground (AsiaOne, 2010) but despite the police’s best effort, Mas Selamat eluded the authorities, much to their great embarrassment. He was subsequently recaptured by the police of neighbouring Malaysia who found him holed up in a small obscure village in the southern Malaysian state of Johore. In parliament, Low had asked for the same standard of

accountability from the government as is practised in the private sector, vis-à-vis the “rolling of heads” of those in charge, including the CEO (firephoenix1003, 2008). This was an oblique but obvious suggestion that DPM Wong Kan Seng resign but the Prime Minister defended his deputy by saying that a line needs to be drawn as to how far up the hierarchy accountability should apply depends on the culpability of the various people in the chain of command. He then famously counter-challenged Low to make an outright call for the DPM Wong to resign, as the police falls under his Home Ministry’s purview. The PM’s challenge was met with cowed silence from Low, much to the dismay of some online commentators who then mocked him.³³ However, Low’s lack of a follow through typifies the reluctance of Singaporeans, even an opposition leader, to push too hard for accountability from the ruling regime.

Although SMRT is not government-run, it is nonetheless government-linked, and without direct evidence of negligence on Saw’s part, it is not unthinkable to presume that she could have enjoyed the same level of immunity as DPM Wong if the same argument that the Prime Minister used to counter Low the Mas Selamat case were applied. Furthermore, the SMRT CEO had already publicly declared her intention to remain in the driver’s seat to fix the cause of SMRT’s declining standard of service. So the question as to why she gave in to the pressure and resigned a couple of weeks later becomes pertinent.

The government continued to maintain a strong grip over the mainstream media, and criticisms of the SMRT failures, although duly reported by the press, television and radio, were relatively mild. The media chose instead to focus on what the authorities were doing to set things right and what they intended to do to make things better in an obvious effort to control the damage. The bitterest criticisms surface primarily through the enablement of social media networking, which consisted primarily of a vocal minority of those who are “Western-educated” (Seah 2011). Seah noted that the “Chinese-speaking heartlands” of Singapore are the traditional supporters of the establishment who are least likely to rock the socio-political boat, therefore the pressure felt by the CEO, if any, is unlikely to be from

³³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tiuWPB1F8s> for an example of Low being mocked.

them. However, in the absence of other obvious reasons, the public opinion generated, which was considerably strong, is likely a large, if not direct factor leading to the CEO's resignation. This is significant as it marks the stepping down of a public figure for the first time in Singapore since independence due to what is perceived as public pressure. It is not unreasonable to extrapolate that the negative public opinion was therefore likely to have been shaped by the minority English-speaking segment of the population.

Several hypotheses are worth exploring to explain this uncommon phenomenon.

4.3.5.1 SMRT problem affected all segments of society

One reason for Singapore's politically indifferent citizenry is because the government has always delivered on bread-and-butter issues and the attitude of the majority is that if things are not broken, no repairs are necessary. A report based on a study by The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) provides evidence that "a majority of Singaporeans prize economic growth over freedom of speech" (Chang, 2011). However, the SMRT breakdowns constitute exactly the type of bread-and-butter issue that eroded this state of contentment.³⁴ The vast majority of Singaporeans depend exclusively on the trains to get to work and school as they have few other alternative ways to commute. The bus service, although reliable, is slow and time consuming. Taxis during peak hours are not readily available due to the surge in demand. It is also relatively expensive for the lower income group as peak hour rides are subject to a host of surcharges. As a result, the SMRT breakdowns were no longer a political issue solely in the domain of the outspoken Western-educated few who were often criticised as people opposing for the sake of opposing.

4.3.5.2 The use of humorous visual images transcends language

The novel way of employing an interactive form of visual art in a humorous way may have also contributed to this breakthrough in engagement of the silent majority, especially from the "Chinese heartlanders" referred to by Seah (2011). Jenks (1995, p. 1) asserts that "images move people more intuitively than words". In the past, cartoons have been used by the opposition community but its use

³⁴ Another major issue that is not within the scope of this thesis is the rising cost of public housing commonly referred to as HDB (Leong, 2011).

had been restricted to the blogosphere and never in the mainstream media. These were all done by professional artists or even amateurs who are fairly proficient at drawing, for examples Ben Soon ("Spore Says Political Cartoon," 2012) or Wing Lee Cheong ("Monthly Digest of Statistics Singapore," 2012). In this case study, Internet memes were employed instead. A very basic technique was used, namely the superimposition of one image onto another, as seen in the majority of the examples in Figures 6a-f and Figures 10a-m. When a template was created by the anonymous person, users were encouraged to freely use their imagination and create personalised visual messages with humorous and sarcastic subtexts. This made the creation of humour memes highly accessible to the ordinary person-in-the-street. Another technique adopted was the "image macro", which involves adding memes onto an image to create a statement not intended by the original image. Examples of these include Figure 6g & 6h and Figure 7a & 7b. The ease with which such graphics can be created, with websites like Image Shack (2011), quickmeme ("Malaysia blogger held for dissent ", 2008) or Meme Generator (2008) means, once again, that the technology to create these pictures is easily accessible.

Additionally, it is of interest to note that the more popular SMRT memes fall under the textless category. This could mean that the pictures have the ability to transcend language barriers and were able to cross from the English-speakers to the Chinese heartlanders. It would be relevant to ask if the use of the Internet memes is breaking down the language divide in socio-political opinions in Singapore. Klotz (2004) had argued that one key weakness of advocacy through the Internet is the low accidental exposure to a campaign message as compared to television and radio. This argument would have been valid before the age of Facebook. Unlike pre-Facebook messages, which had to be consciously clicked on by the recipient to be accessed either in an email or a hyperlink leading to a static website, Facebook links "shared" by friends are automatically posted in the Newsfeed page. The user therefore has a lot less discretion in selecting what he or she wishes to see and accidental exposure would be significantly higher. This squares with Gustafsson's (2012) argument that users who are not members of political parties or interest organisations are indeed "exposed to political content and requests for participation" (p. 1111). At the same time, Gustafsson together with Baumgartner and Morris (2009) cautioned that this does not mean they are obliged to respond. The mere exposure alone, nonetheless, can make a

major difference in influencing fence-sitters who after the unintentional exposure to an opposing or alternative viewpoint may be primed to consider the merit of an alternative viewpoint. The use of a meme, which succinctly encapsulates a position without lengthy arguments, makes it doubly possible and powerful. It is worth reiterating Ford and Ferguson's (2004) argument that disparaging humour strengthens shared norms of prejudice and the memes may have done just that when they transfused across the different segments of Singapore society. A deeper implication of this is how the sphere of politics broadens through the enablement of social media technology with humour forming a part of a wide range of everyday communication of the ordinary people.

4.3.5.3 Transmedia coverage

Another possible explanation for the power of the memes is their re-appropriation across multiple platforms, thereby increasing their visibility. The humorous memes were deemed as sufficiently benign as to escape the OB markers described in chapter one (see 1.4 Finding humour in the midst of this). The memes were reproduced in the mainstream newspaper as well as in the television news, thus increasing their "symbolic power" (Cammaerts, et al., 2013, p. 5). Costanza-Chock (2013, p. 97) had noted that "social movements are more effective" when "transmedia mobilization" is adopted because no single medium is sufficient to drive a movement forward alone. When the memes receive the attention of the mainstream media, they gain an additional leverage that Lipsky (1968) calls "referenced public". While it would be easy to ignore the rantings of disparate individuals online, ignoring the aggregated indignation that has been highlighted by the mainstream media is much harder.

4.3.5.4 The Internet eroding the authorities' monopoly on the media

Another question the SMRT issue raises is whether this is yet another shift of opinion leadership from traditional media producers to the media consumers themselves. According to Lim (2011), Singapore rising to 67 per cent, up from previously 59 per cent (S. Wee, 2009) in just two years, has the highest Internet penetration in Southeast Asia. In contrast, statistics show a downward trend for the

circulation of English language newspapers, while Chinese newspapers are on a slight rise (Nielsen Media Index 2008, as cited by Tan 2008). In a survey by the IPS 65.8 per cent of respondents aged 21-39 view the Internet as an important source of political news compared to 38.5 per cent for those between 40-59 and 27.3 per cent for those aged 60 and above ("Survey on Political Traits and Media Use," 2011). The SMRT episode, together with several other significant events that followed, like the General Election and Presidential Election in 2011, and a by-election in 2012, suggests a correlation between the introduction of social media and the government's loss of absolute control over the public's perception. In both the general and by-election, the government suffered significant losses (Adam & Javier, 2012). As for the Presidential Election, although the ruling party-backed candidate won, at 35.2 per cent of the popular vote and only a mere 0.34 per cent ahead³⁵ of his nearest rival it was a narrow victory ("Survey on Political Traits and Media Use," 2011). With more alternative views and louder criticisms online, support for the government was likely to have been affected although more study is needed to ascertain the quantum as well as the precise source of the government's weakening grip. The satire in this case study may or may not have played a significant role in eroding the people's trust in the government. However, from the zealous response of online citizens, as well as the mainstream media's interest, it is safe to conclude the sarcastic memes resonated with the commuters' frustration could have contributed to the debate questioning the wisdom of placing unwavering trust in those in charge. At the very least, this case study is suggesting strongly that the Singapore media may be on the cusp of a new era in terms of how citizens engage politically with those in authorities. Further research is needed to confirm this.

4.4 Implications

The SMRT incident, albeit a minor event in Singapore's political history, stands out as significant in terms of impact on the citizens' political awareness. Ordinary citizens are normally compliant, submissive and reticent in public after having been long denied a free public space to voice their

³⁵ The first four presidents of Singapore were appointed by the government. Ong Teng Cheong became the first popularly elected President in 1993 after an amendment to the Law. His disputes with the government during his Presidency led many to believe that his successor SR Nathan was selected for his acquiescence to the ruling government (HWZ Forums, 2011; "Prataman Finally Admitted He Was A VERY EXPENSIVE PUPPET! Really Dun Know What to Say," 2011). Nathan was elected into office unopposed. However, in the 2011 Presidential Election two independent candidates contested against the PAP endorsed candidate, Tony Tan.

feelings and thoughts. However, the Internet may have opened up new public spaces for this purpose. Through the convenient and creative use of technology some citizens have found a more open space where their voices can be heard and potentially allow them to contribute to change in a socio-political realm that hitherto had been the exclusive domain of politicians or activists.

An unprecedented victory for the ordinary citizen may have been achieved when a minority of unconnected individuals successfully influenced public opinion to add pressure to a government-linked public figure into accepting responsibility for incompetence and negligence by stepping down. Although SMRT is not formally part of the government, Singaporeans nonetheless regard it as part of the same exclusive elite club because it is government-assisted and the board members are mostly connected to government departments, ministries or statutory boards in one way or another ("Board of Directors," 2012b). This also appears to be an instance when the public sphere was momentarily reclaimed by ordinary citizens via the Internet and Singaporeans have found, after a long period of being excluded, a voice through humour. This thesis will further explore in the next chapter if the SMRT episode is a one-off situation where public outcry had shocked people into unintentional political engagement, or whether new culture of activism with similar online protests and the use of such visual satire has taken root.

It should also be asked whether this visual SMRT protest was particularly effective because of its novelty and, should it be used again, would the efficacy of the method be more or less impressive? While much scholarship has been devoted to the study of how the Internet is transforming the global political and economic landscape, including its effect of democratisation through the empowering of the disenfranchised (Conroy, Feezell, & Guerrero, 2012; Knudsen & Stage, 2012; O'Neill, 2010; Saleh, 2012; Stephan, 2013; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012), the spaces of humour have been neglected, particularly in the form of authoritarian democracies like Singapore and Malaysia. The use of humour can also be interpreted as a form of political culture jam similar to the jamming techniques employed by commercial competitors to call into question the branding techniques used by rivals to sell their products (Warner, 2007, p. 19) and politicians similarly package and sell their political agenda using the same branding techniques, which are designed to "drown out dissident messages". The use of

humour can turn the tables on the dominant voices by “opening up different ways of participating in public life without the demands for political capital or engaging in the scandal-based, aggressive and party-political debates that tend to be the main forms of political accountability” (Matheson, 2012). In this respect, an earlier conjecture that Tsakona and Popa’s (2011) analysis that “humour serves mainly two functions: it conveys criticism against the political status quo and it recycles and reinforces dominant values and views on politics” (p. 2) appears to be valid. There are strong indications that the SMRT memes are indeed performing social functions by provoking and inducing social change, albeit at low levels, i.e. by providing an alternative view but short of promoting resistance or calling for action to oppose. Sreekumar and Vadrevu (2013) proposes a similar argument that this “practice of posting static visual online memes on social media by political actors” is “to convey messages that comment on the ruling party and its policies in Singapore” and to criticise the status quo. These aspects of non-aggressive humour in the Singapore political landscape could possibly lead to the growth of emerging online multiple public spheres (Dahlgren, 1995; Lunt & Livingstone, 2013; Papacharissi, 2002) and may signal a clear turning point in how politics are negotiated in the authoritarian state. The next chapter will examine how this change in political negotiation is brought about.

5 Case Study two: SGAG and the 6.9 million population White Paper

While the previous chapter identified citizen satire as a noteworthy emerging phenomenon, this chapter takes the analysis forward by constructing a framework for systematic study and by exploring techniques that can lead to a better understanding of why and how citizen satire is being used. The citizen-produced memes appear to be arbitrary acts in the sense that they were performed by different marginalised individuals without any strategic organisation or coordination. Nevertheless, it would seem worthwhile to try and find some overall, coherent patterns in this varied and complex media landscape that can perhaps act as a map for navigating through it. Anderson (2012) proposed that charting a media landscape, or mediascape, as he calls it, is analogous to geographers mapping an environmental landscape. As discussed in detail earlier in the general Methodology section (see also 3.1 Online ethnography), a media compass defines the important parameters (namely, properties, processes, consequence and character) that can yield useful insights into a media object under study. Anderson's approach has been adapted to this case study to probe the culture and practices surrounding the visual memes produced in response to the Singapore government's Population White Paper of 2013. This snapshot of yet another significant media event in Singapore arguably supports the claim in the previous chapter that citizen satire is an emerging phenomenon in the context of authoritarian democracies like Malaysia and Singapore where the ruling regimes are trying to cope with the tension that exists between maintaining control over what citizens can say or do and keeping the market open. New dynamics have arisen as a result of Web 2.0, which is providing citizens an alternative means of negotiating with those in power.

SGAG, a Facebook humour page, is visual humour by request. Unlike the meme examples in the SMRT case study, SGAG does not use a template but has a skilled Photoshop artist being cheered on by an audience. SGAG is essentially, a small group of amateur or semi-professional "artists" expressing their thoughts and sharing it with their following (Barry Schmelly, 2013). With 390,548 likes on its Facebook page, and 78.63 per cent of its traffic domestically based (SimilarWeb, 2016) SGAG is popular and has a significant presence in Singapore's mediascape. SGAG's choice of social media platforms (98.37 per cent of its traffic is derived from Facebook, with the rest from Twitter,

YouTube and Instagram *ibid.*) means comments and responses to the memes are easily available for qualitative assessment. While the earlier exploratory chapter analysed the communication properties within the memes and some of the comments, a more comprehensive framework of analysis is necessarily to allow for a more systematic approach that provides a wider overview of the case. This chapter therefore establishes and applies a broader framework to study these exemplar visual memes so as to generate both a macro as well as a micro view of how citizen satire works within the SGAG context.

The chapter also tests Anderson's media compass for its usefulness. The focus on the four aforementioned parameters should provide clarity to the essential aspects within this mediascape that enriches the understanding of citizen satire. Properties of the mediascape would be the static information such as statistics of the number of views, likes and comments that should show trends and patterns. An analysis of each meme's content properties should show the methods used to convey and transmit ideas and humour, for example the styles of humour favoured by those within this context. Processes should connect the interactions between the memes, the producer of the memes and the viewers as well as those among the viewers themselves. The processes should also show how information flows back and forth among the various parties and how some interpretations and ideas are taken up and developed and others are challenged. In addition, they should also show how commentators negotiate with the producer and with other commentators and provide glimpses into the nature of some image decoding procedure, especially the instances when not everybody gets the humour. In short, this chapter, using the media compass, should identify how the funny is done, and having done so some possible consequence of these funnies could be identified. At the same time, it should demonstrate what funnies can do that normal communication, for example, reasoned arguments and orthodox rhetoric, cannot achieve.

5.1 Theoretical sampling

This case study will examine archived data of a specific socio-political Facebook page in Singapore and the selected data will specifically comprise posts and comments by the SGAG Singapore community relating to a single event, namely, the Singapore government White Paper proposing to

increase the population of Singapore from the current 5.5 million to 6.9 million by the year 2030 through a more liberal immigration policy.

This case study will examine the memes posted by *SGAG Singapore* as well as the culture and practices of the online community's participation. An examination of a humour site can be useful as a "thermometer" for gauging the emotions of an otherwise reticent citizenry, as research on totalitarian states have shown how people deprived of freedom turn to jokes as both a relief mechanism as well as a form of passive-aggression to counter the assault on their freedom (Davies, 2010, p. 300). The aforementioned event was chosen because it was a media event of significance in terms of impact and public interest. The previous chapter documented the increasing awareness of Singaporeans that they can no longer take the running of their country for granted, with major security lapses involving the escape of a suspected terrorist and vandals spray painting graffiti on public trains. The increased population had severely stressed the infrastructure. A White Paper on strategies for coping with an increased population fuelled fears that sparked a very heated, nationwide debate. The government bulldozing the paper through caused many furious Singaporeans to stage an extremely rare protest numbering more than 3,000 people (Han, 2013; Hodal, 2013; Sim, 2013).

That it had a clearly demarcated start and end point made the White Paper event a suitable object to track and study. Furthermore, SGAG is an important socio-political humour site. It describes itself as "[f]unny, current and uniquely Singaporean" and makes a disclaimer that "[w]e are in no way related to the original 9GAG", which is a humour site based in USA. The main website is at www.sgag.sg and its twitter, https://twitter.com/#!/SGAG_SG. Emails can be directed to sgag.singapore@gmail.com." Due to its large following and prominent presence on Facebook in Singapore and the availability of many memes curated, SGAG would have been an important symbol if not a fair representation of the reactions of Singaporeans to the White Paper (refer to 3.2 Using Case Studies for the case selection criteria).

A report by DBS Vickers, a securities company, released on 18 January 2013 first hinted at the White Paper ("What is MSC?," n.d.). It immediately prompted two humorous responses in the form of image

macros produced by SGAG Singapore on 21 and 24 January. A by-election held on 26 January temporarily drew attention away from this issue but when the White Paper was officially published on 29 January interest in the topic revived and generated more activity. This case study tracked the memes posted from the pre-release date on 18 January (and the associated activities on the Facebook page) to 8 February, the date the White Paper was published (Group, 2004), two days prior to the Lunar New Year holiday of 2013.

5.2 Approach: Metaphor of mediascape

Anderson's (2012) metaphor of mapping geographical landscapes, as discussed in 3.1, has been adapted to this study. His "mediascape compass" (p. 25) with *properties*, *processes*, *consequence* and *character* as four major points of significance provides a wide-ranging coverage of the media object under study for what is significant and interesting in terms of how the memes are constructed, how the interaction within the community is facilitated and what is the impact of such interaction. In the following sections, each of the four compass points will be utilised to probe the SGAG mediascape. A brief discussion of how each compass point translates into an image of the actual mediascape begins the analysis. Data about SGAG are then presented and examined closely based on the parameters of the compass points so that appropriate interpretations can be constructed.

5.3 Analysis and Discussion

5.3.1 Properties

The properties of the media are the characteristics and qualities of an event analogous to the material properties of a geographical landscape. In the present socio-political humour research context, this will refer to the static attributes and meanings embedded within the communication object, namely the memes, which make up a major unit of analysis, for example, how are they constructed, what intended meaning might be embedded in them, and how the funniness is achieved. Properties also encompass quantitatively identified dimensions of the material, including the frequency of likes and shares, and the number of comments by members and other metric values. The analysis also

encompasses the properties of the audiences: the demographics in terms of socio-economic status like gender, age, education, profession. Interpretively, it can include the attractiveness or meaningfulness of the texts to the audience, and the comments by the audience forms another major unit of analysis in this study.

Taken as a whole, the properties may answer the research questions that are specifically pertinent to this case study, for instance:

- Who are the producers and distributors of socio-political humour?
- What ideologies lie behind the users of socio-political humour?
- What are their motivations for posting socio-political humour?
- What are the contents in these socio-political memes?

5.3.1.1 *Properties of the event*

The timeline for the entire chosen event has been summarised in Table 5.1 to show the start and end points that bracket this particular event so as to provide a demarcated context for the sequence of memes that were created in reaction or response to other events, adjacent to a wider socio-political context. Some trends and patterns emerge from the data that indicate the viewing patterns of the audience, for instance, how much they like certain memes, their willingness to share it forward or make comments.

Date	Sub-event	Meme	Like	Shares	Comments
21 /1	DBS Vickers releases report	01: This is Singaporeeeee	1,123	1,052	69
22-23/1		20 non-related posts			
24 /1		02: simple solution to problem but our gahmen don't get it	1,123	197	48
25/1		30 non-related posts			
26 /1	Punggol By-election				
29 /1	White Paper released				
29 /1		03 Singapore 2030: 6.9 Population	858	294	25
29 /1		04 Singapore 2030 How to Live with a 7 million	3,144	1,516	145

Date	Sub-event	Meme	Like	Shares	Comments
		population in SG – redesign			
		our MRT			
29 /1		05 Singapore 2030 How to	724	184	49
		Live with a 7 million			
		population in SG – multi			
		Level SG			
29 /1		1 non-related post			
29 /1		06 Our Trains, Our Buses 7	1,318	284	46
		Million People Ho Seh Bo?			
30 /1		07 Seaview executive	943	228	52
		condominium			
30 /1		1 non-related post			
30 /1		08 Sorry We're Full	1,177	114	30
30 /1		1 non-related post			
30 /1		09 Are you ready for 6.9	3,173	2,045	168
		million people in Singapore			
		2030			
30 /1		10 Impregnate more women	647	148	23
		since you earn 2 million per			
		year			
30 /1		11: 300 not enough	1,267	1,061	58
30 /1		12: Hei sho hei sho	607	199	13
30 /1		1 non-related posts			
30 /1		13 Are you	2,984	1,776	134
		ready_overcrowded bus			
31 /1		14 How they see it How we	1,358	389	28
		see it			
31 /1		1 non-related post			
31 /1		15 Introducing the new	1,811	549	82
		double decker bendy bus			
31 /1		16 SBS New Buses 2010	920	345	59
		2020 2030			
31 /1		4 non-related posts			
1 /2		17: Sardinapore	1,285	235	22
1 /2		3 non-related posts			

Date	Sub-event	Meme	Like	Shares	Comments
2 /2		18: 6.0 Million Eggs	1,358	389	24
2 /2		19: The real double decker bendy bus to prepare for 2030	2,279	488	106
2 /2		20: Keep Counting Singapore	714	353	26
3/2		13 non-related posts			
4 /2	First round of debate on White Paper on Population				
5 /2		21 PM Lee Petition	631	41	37
5 /2		22 Can bargain or not	463	54	6
5 /2		23 Snake swallowing tail	731	215	18
5/2		12 non-related posts			
6 /2		24 Since you say until Singaporeans can just pack up and leave...	1,179	398	133
	5 non-related posts				
7 /2		25 The kind of stunts we need to pull to squeeze into trains nowadays	1,008	184	26
8 /2	The population white paper was endorsed with an amendment on Friday				
		5 non-related posts			
8 /2		26 Khaw Boon Wan's plea	1,355	245	20
10-11 /2	Chinese New Year				

Table 5.1: Timeline of event and sub-events.

The comments, likes and shares, as argued in section 2.3.3.2 Facebook, are functional miniature public spheres and therefore their frequency can be indicative of the size and strength, and how representative they might be of what people are feeling, or how much an impact they might have. When placed in a line graph (Figure 5.1), a correlation is observable, with a corresponding rise in

shares (green) and comments (blue) whenever the likes (red) increase and a similar dip in the shares and comments when likes decrease. However, this correlation is stronger between likes and shares where the rises and falls are across a greater range, (from 463 to 3173 for likes, yielding a wide range of 2710; from 41 to 1776 for shares, with a range of 1735) and significantly weaker with comments. Even though the trend for the number of comments does follow the trend for likes and shares, on the whole, the range of movement for the number of comments varies only between 6 to 168, a mere range of 162. The blue line is noticeably flatter across the event. This can probably be explained by the relatively more effort it takes for members of the community to write a comment, compared to the simple act of clicking a button to Like or share.

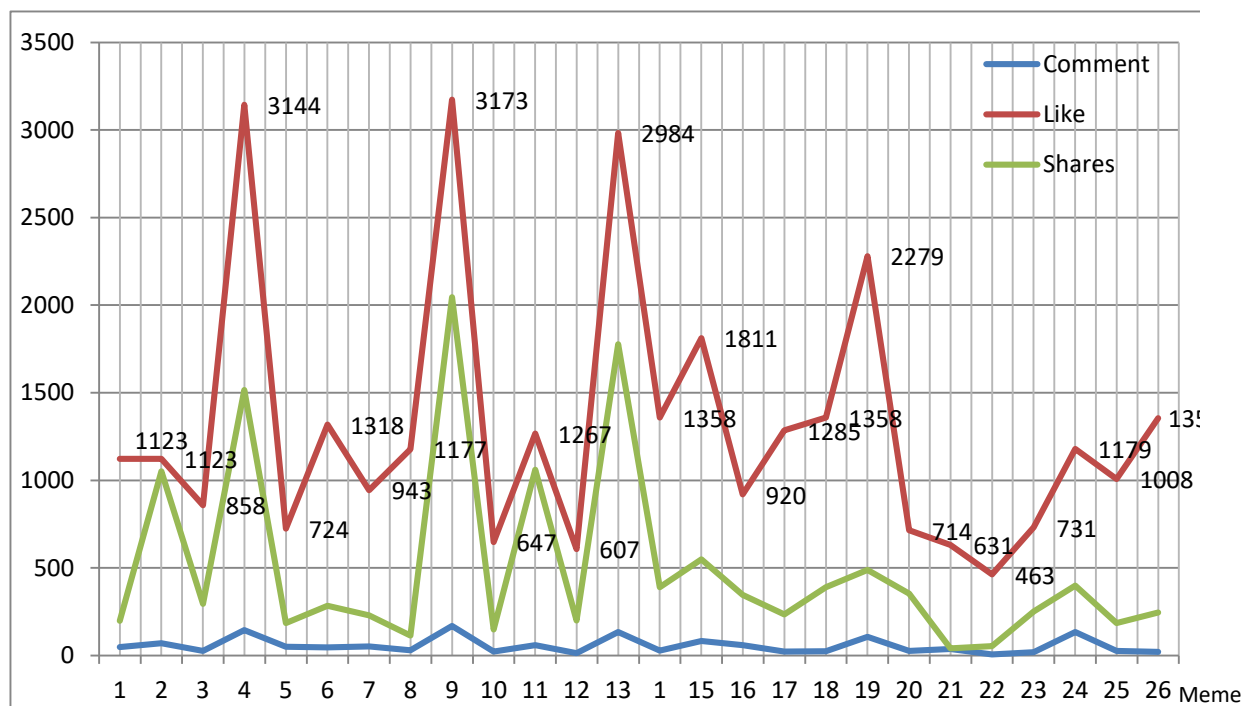


Figure 5.1: Trend for Likes, Shares and Comments.

Represented differently in Figure 5.2, the size of the bubble indicates the bigger number of shares and the overall gradient upwards to the right indicates a positive correlation. Analysing the overall trend, the greatest spike in interest is in almost immediate response to an issue that arises, followed by an overall decline in interest. This suggests the life span of a meme is short, even though it may initially

successfully provoke strong interest. Statistical analysis from research on the number of comments and likes in the US Presidential 2012 elections has shown that they can be influenced by “the element of persuasion used on the posts” (Bronstein, 2013, p. 173). A study on Facebook likes as a predictor of the outcome of an election in India also showed a positive correlation between high number of likes to the higher number of popular votes (Barclay, Pichandy, Venkat, & Sudhakaran, 2015, p. 134). These studies provide a basis for positing that the high number of clicks on the social buttons in the SGAG posts is a fair indication of the persuasiveness of the posts, which in turn provides the rationale for selectively analysing the memes for the high/low likes and shares in the next section, as well as later chapters that examine memes for their means of persuasion. Further statistical analysis to determine any other implications of this property, however, is out of the scope of this study.

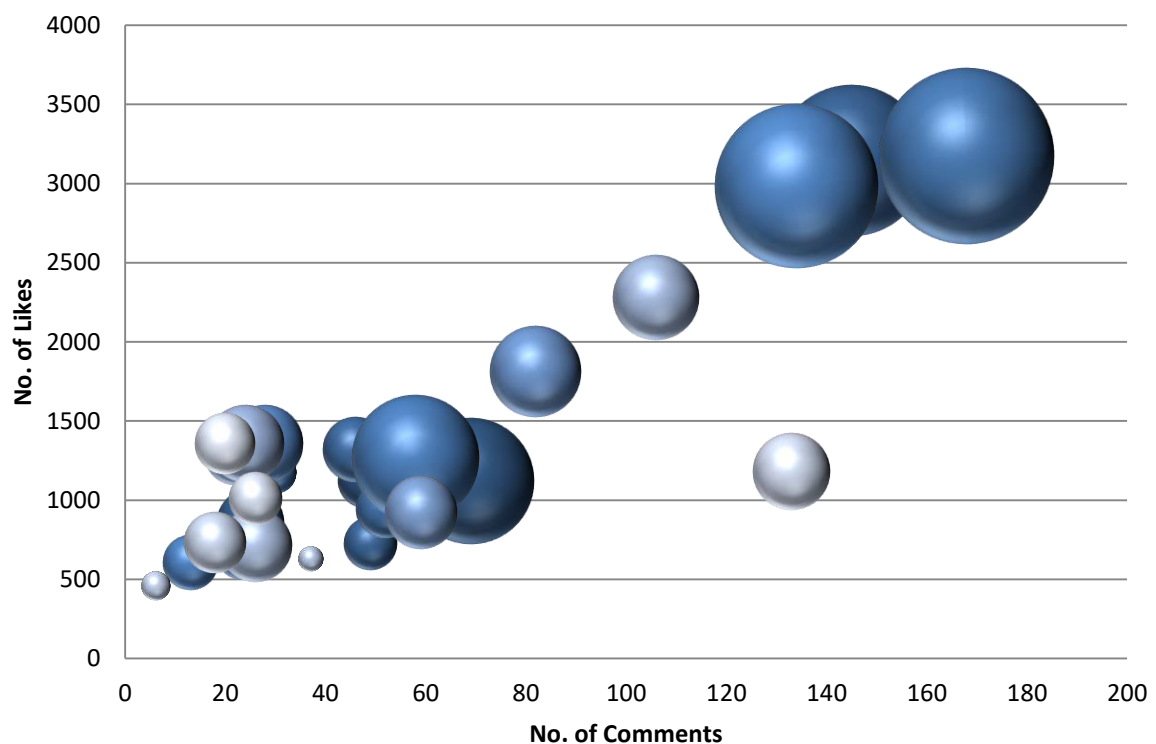


Figure 5.2: Positive correlations between Comments, Likes and Shares.

5.3.1.2 Memes

One of the main units of analysis is the comments in response to the memes. The assumption that comments are a window to the inner workings of the audiences' minds is based on social network

comments research by Gearhart & Kang (2014), which has shown that comments function as “heuristic cues” (p. 244) that affect perception quality and credibility of news sites.

To organise the data, I have firstly lined up the memes in order of the least to the most comments, as illustrated in Table 5.2, the five texts that received the fewest responses were 22, 12, 23, 26, and 17 and the most popular ones are 19, 24, 13, 4, and 9. As there were altogether 1447 comments throughout the period of the event, it was strategically prudent to sample the top and bottom memes for semiotic analysis to determine their properties. This is based on the earlier assertion that the posts with most reactions (whether in likes, shares or comments) are likely the most persuasive. Analysing the memes least commented on will provide some form of juxtaposition between the persuasive ones and the less persuasive memes.

It is interesting to note that all the memes (03, 05, 07, 10, 12, 20, 21, 22 and 23) that received fewer than 1000 likes were unrelated to the MRT, with the exception of Meme 16, which was yet another variation of the multi-decked bus. Posted ten days after the White Paper issue began, this exception could be explained by a comment complaining that the motif was getting repetitive. The other exception was Meme 24, which had more than a thousand likes even though it was not directly related to the symbolic overcrowded MRT. Instead it was a provocative statement by Minister Dr Amy Khor, the image of which was framed to suggest new citizens are favoured by the government over native-born Singaporeans. This fuelled netizens’ intense indignation at what they regarded as tantamount to being told to “pack up and leave” the country if they find life too difficult in Singapore. The origin of the “quitter” label being used as an insult can be traced back to former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong’s National Day speech in 2002, which sparked a debate over the real source of the loss of confidence. An opposition figure had responded to PM Goh that “it is not confidence in themselves or in their country that the people are losing. They are losing confidence in your government” (SCMP, 2002).

Meme	Comment	
22	6	Least popular
12	13	
23	18	
26	20	
17	22	
10	23	
18	24	
3	25	
20	26	
25	26	
1	28	
8	30	
21	37	
6	46	
1	48	
5	49	
7	52	
11	58	
16	59	
2	69	
15	82	
19	106	Most popular
24	133	
13	134	
4	145	
9	168	
Total	1447	

Table 5.2: Least to most popular memes.

The image of Khor provided a convenient target, a representation of the villain upon whom anger and hatred could be projected, and this, as well as the other similar memes reinforces Tsakona and Popa's (2011, pp. 1-2) assertions that political humour is primarily subversive, with the intention "to influence audiences to challenge decisions and policies", and to convey "criticism against the political status quo". However, the examples here did not support their third assertion about humour recycling and reinforcing "dominant values and views on politics".

5.3.1.2.1 *Least popular*

Taken in chronological order, the first meme to be examined is Meme 12 (Figure 5.3), which is the

fourth of five memes posted on the same day of 30 January. The picture is a screenshot of the popular Singapore-made satirical television programme *The Noose* (2013) with actress Michelle Choong playing the part of a mainland Chinese immigrant, Lulu. The caption “No want become minority? Hei sho hei sho lahhhh!!! – A friendly message from Lulu” is prominent and worded in typical broken English commonly observed among the Chinese immigrants. The priority of the phrase “Hei sho hei sho...” signals the punchline, as it is a code understood by the local viewers as the euphemistic sound effects of people engaged in vigorous sex. The reference of the message is to the government’s suggestion that because Singaporeans are not having enough babies to replenish the population, they have to bring in more immigrants. Lulu is suggesting that Singaporeans should have more sex to make more babies rather than blaming the arrival of the Chinese immigrants. This is denoted by the use of “LAHHH!!!”, which is a grammatical article in Singlish, the colloquial English spoken by Singaporeans, and is used to make an emphasis. Her gaudy clothes connote the poor fashion sense that Singaporeans view Chinese immigrants as having, despite their wealth. Her name is a code for what Singaporeans view as a failed attempt to sound modern and Westernised, as Lulu, is not fashionable and more commonly associated with girls in sleazy professions. Although this meme taps into certain emotional triggers that Singaporeans feel over the issue, the lower popularity of this meme could be due to the fewer people who are affected by the low birth rate issue. Unless one takes time to process the logic behind the argument framed within this meme, the distance between feelings of anger over being reduced to a minority and their lack of reproductivity is quite far, making it unlikely to provoke anything more than a gentle chuckle.



Figure 5.3: Meme 12 – Hei Sho Hei Sho Lahhh!!!

Meme 17 (Figure 5.4) draws from the expression “being squeezed like sardines in a tin can”. The caption is a blend of “Sardine” and “Singapore” and draws the similarity to a lack of space in Singapore and the fish crammed into a small tin. The Singapore flag as the label’s background indicates clearly this is Singapore that is being referenced, with a map of Singapore in front of it. The man holding a fish is wearing white, the uniform of the ruling party, and has the PAP logo on his chest, marking him as a government minister. The viewers will understand that the fish is a “dead” (note the X in place of the eyes) Singaporean, who is being handled as nothing more than a commodity by the government, hence the faint dollar signs written all over its body. The partially opened tin shows iconic buildings of Singapore: the Ferris wheel, the new Marina Bay Sands casino and hotel, and the Esplanade, which are all money making structures to prop up the economy of the country. Stick figures of people spilling over the edge of the tin and falling to their death represent the ordinary Singaporeans being edged out and are a reference to the pressure they face daily, and also to the high suicide rate in Singapore. A meme such as this will probably be

considered cute but again does not tap into strong feelings that will resonate with the anxiety and frustration that Singaporeans are experiencing. A likely response would be a smile and a nod of acknowledgement of the humour, which could be one explanation of its comparatively lower popularity.

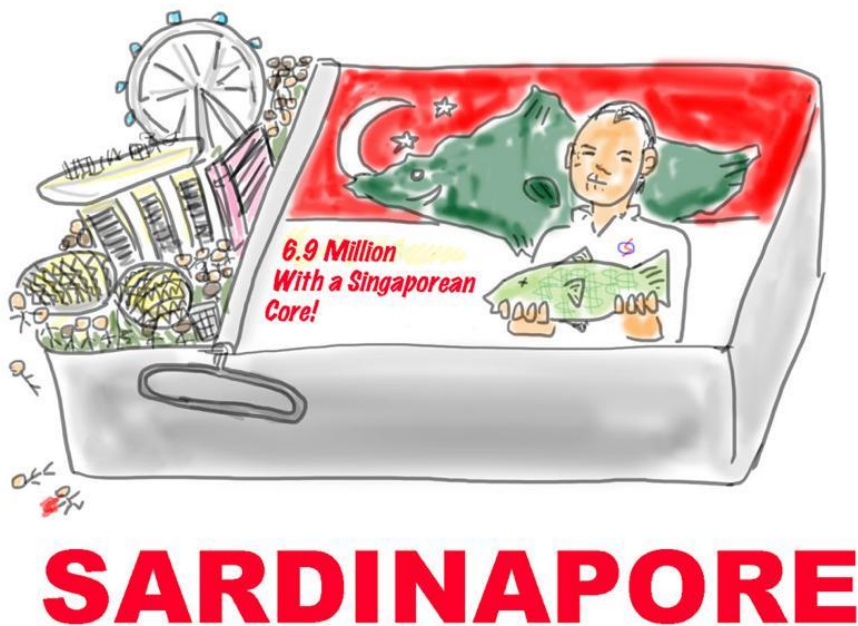


Figure 5.4: Meme 17 – Sardinapore.

The black and white photograph of Meme 22 (Figure 5) depicts a wet market in Singapore that Singaporeans still frequent, although less often compared to the convenient modern supermarket. Wet markets are popular among housewives as they can develop a relationship with the vendors and can sometimes bargain for lower prices, unlike the fixed prices of supermarkets. This gives rise to the common quip similar to the caption “Eh, hello, you think go market buy vegetable ah?” which is a form of sarcasm, as if one is trying to point out to an unaware and ill-informed person (“Eh, hello”) with the suggestion that there is a serious misunderstanding of the situation, as framed in a rhetorical question (“you think....ah?”). The reference is to the government’s backpedalling after it received a backlash from announcing the initial 7 million figure. It subsequently said that the figure is only a maximum projection and may in reality only reach less than that by 2030. The image suggests that Singaporeans bargain with the government for an even lower figure, and obliquely implies that the government is unprofessional and is operating like a market vendor instead of the more high-class

supermarket which is confident of its pricing and will not negotiate with customers. There is a certain cerebral quality in this meme as it engages the viewer's logic. For the humour to work, viewers need to cognitively recognise the oppositional script embedded in this irony. This may be hard work and too distracting for the meme to evoke a spontaneous sense of funniness.



Figure 5.5: Meme 22 – Singaporean uses bargain.

The centre of the image in Meme 23 (Figure 5.6) is a black-and-white *ouroboros*³⁶ although the denotation may not be as positive as the ancient idea of self-renewal. The reference may be more to the negative vicious cycle Singaporeans perceive themselves and the government to be in. The snake was probably in part inspired also by the impending Chinese Lunar New Year of 2013, which according to the Chinese Zodiac, was the year of the Snake. The Chinese will be consciously making references to events and interpret them within this astrological framework. The colour red is also likely a direct association with the Chinese belief that it symbolises prosperity during the New Year season. The speech bubble “Om Nom” is an Internet expression indicating the act of eating something

³⁶ From Greek for “tail devouring snake”: an ancient circular symbol depicting a serpent, sometimes a dragon, swallowing its tail. It serves as an emblem of infinity

with relish (“Nom” connoting a “yummy” response”) and suggests the snake is happily eating itself without any awareness of the negative consequences it faces. This can be interpreted by the viewers as the government being blissfully unaware that it is swallowing itself up as it is too busy enjoying the meal. The cycle of reasoning is subtitled by a series of short questions (“why need?”, “Why not enough?”, etc.). Once again, this is a clever meme that has many logical elements built into the meme. A viewer would have to study this image and rationally work out the message of this meme. A reasonable reaction to this kind of meme would be an “aha, I get it” smile rather than a spontaneous guffaw. The lower popularity may be an acknowledgement of the cleverness of this meme rather than its funniness.



Figure 5.6: Meme 23 – Snake Swallowing Tail.

Meme 26 (Figure 5.7) is a screenshot of a comment left on the Minister of Housing's Facebook page. This meme required a textual approach as it is a direct intertextual link to the minister's page, that is, it's not a cartoon-like image but an actual text that's reinterpreted. It would be more appropriately marked as a public critique as it is more directly connected to politics, unlike an image macro or cartoon. There is again absent the spontaneous evocative humorous quality of the popular memes that produce a strong "twist" in the visual oppositional script. Meme 26 is a parody of the Minister's speech in parliament where he begged in a mock fashion the parliament, and by extension, the people, to pass the White Paper so that he can have the foreign workers required to carry out his development plans.

To complete the ramped up construction programme, I do need more construction workers, more than currently available. And that is why I was shocked when I heard WP's recommendation yesterday: that we freeze the foreign worker population, immediately and for 8 years. That is throwing a spanner in my building plan. My housing plan will be badly affected! I will not be able to deliver the new flats as promised to 200,000 families. On behalf of these families, I ask the Workers' Party to rethink its idea and approach. They are our people too, Singaporeans. Many people need to move house, set up families and have babies. Please do not disrupt the plan

(N. Lim, 2012).

This satirical post offers the flip-side of the situation as experienced by the ordinary Singaporeans, while using the phrases and words of the Minister himself, for example, "throwing a spanner in my building plan" is rendered as "...like throwing a spanner into my future plans". The minister's "I will not be able to deliver the new flats as promised to 200,000 families" is reinterpreted as "I will not be able to deliver babies as promised to my parents". "On behalf of these families, I ask the Workers' Party to rethink its idea and approach" was reframed as "On behalf of my parents I ask your great Party, please rethink your idea and your approach" and so on. A viewer of this meme would have to expend a fair amount of mental energy deciphering this meme, which can only lead to an intellectual assent to the cleverness of the meme, but unlikely a burst of laughter, by the end of the process.



Figure 5.7: Meme 26 – Minister Khaw Boon Wan's plea.

Taking the five least popular memes as a whole one common characteristic shared by them is the memes use some form of logical appeal. Lulu naughtily suggested the way to overcome the influx of immigrants is to have more Singaporean babies. Sardinapore is merely illustrative of the situation and does not contain much persuasion. The Singapore market bargainer, the ouroboros, and Minister Khaw's plea all require logic to work out the sarcasm and humour. SGAG has demonstrated an eye for incongruities within the Singapore government's policies. The memes were humorous attempts to engage the audience on a logical level, and can be interpreted as SGAG's contribution to the political discourse of Singapore in a reasonable manner. Co-founder Barry Schmelly (2016) had asserted that he "never meant to represent the opposition nor the incumbent" and explained his need for politicians to "create a topic" so as not to trend "rubbish" that are "superficial".

Research has shown that matching an audience's attitudinal dimension (whether they are operating at a cognitive or affective level) with a similarly positioned message increases the chance of successful

persuasion (Edwards, 1990; Edwards & Von Hippel, 1995; Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). The lower response rates for these cognitively orientated memes could be explained as a structural mismatch with the emotionally heightened MRT issue. Having said that, it bears remembering that the measure of popularity used here is by way of the comments the memes elicited. The lower number of comments could just as reasonably be due to viewers being in agreement and as such the lack of motivation to add the conversation because the logic is already obvious or because SGAG has made a good case that does not require further elaboration: the data cannot conclusively say why the comments were fewer. Larsson (2016) cautioned that relationships between support and social media activities “are too complex to be understood in such [simplistic] terms” and as such, this thesis is not making an argument from a negative. What it does highlight is the visible dip in responses to logical arguments that may be worth further scholarly attention. However, this thesis does make an argument that the poorer response rate is unlikely to be due to a reluctance to engage in a debate, as the next set of memes will show that SGAG’s viewers are not shy of offering their opinion.

5.3.1.2.2 *Most popular*

The popular memes stand in strong contrast with the least popular memes above. A distinguishing feature shared by these five is the exploitation of intense emotional appeal in the way they are composed, with its strong reliance on visual elements and minimal or no words used, thus achieving an “affective match” with the equally affective breakdown issue (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). Meme 4 (Figure 5.8) was published on 29 February, the same day the White Paper was officially released. This quick response by the meme creator captured the attention of the site’s followers. It was one of three images published by SGAG on the same day and received 3,144 likes, 1,516 shares and 145 comments. The choice of an overcrowded SMRT train was a clever appropriation of the earlier major media event of the Chapter 4 case study. This image is a stark visual representation of overcrowding, and here the visual can do what words can’t in terms of claiming to see the future. Unlike the least popular memes discussed earlier, which resorted to words and logic, the numbers are made tangible. The image was taken from a regular publicity photo of the train company, SMRT, snaking above ground through a typical Singapore “heartland”. The train is moving around a bend, and has for its

background a mosque, lots of green trees and high-rise flats. The train, however, has been manipulated to three storeys to suggest the necessity for tripling its capacity in order to cope. Level markings denoting “Now” at “5.31 million”, “2020” at “6 million”, and “2030” at “6.9 million” suggest that at each milestone, there will be a need for a corresponding increase in the capacity of the trains, and each increment is cleverly represented visually. Foregrounded prominently is the copy “Singapore 2030: How to live with a 7 million population in SG – redesign our MRT”. This meme exploits the most visible evidence of the consequence of an inflated population – the MRT, which is fast becoming a symbol of the perceived population crisis. With very few words, the triple decked MRT train against the background of the heartlands succinctly illustrates visually the hardship that increased population will bring. Viewers of SGAG would be able to identify with the fear of the consequences of over-crowding presented in the irony of the memes, and there was a need to assign blame, resulting in the xenophobia that was prominent in the comments in the analysis in 5.3.2.3 Process C. Disappointment in the government was similarly conspicuous. The high number of likes and shares is an indication of the endorsement of those who may not have commented but who by clicking and sharing, are strengthening what Ford and Ferguson (2004) calls the “shared norms of prejudice”. Where once such mocking of government policy may have been taboo, through the use of the humorous memes, such mocking becomes normalised and as a result, common.



Figure 5.8: Meme 4 – Singapore 2030 How to Live with a 7 million population in SG redesign our MRT

Meme 9 (Figure 5.9) was published the next day and was one of two images. Meme 9 attracted 3173 likes, 2045 shares and 168 comments. It continued with the theme of the overcrowded trains, a sore point with commuters that has been brewing since the major breakdowns in two years earlier ("Singapore's Election 'Watershed' May Loosen Political Hold of Lee's Party," 2011). The image of people hanging to the side of the train is taken from a typical scene in India where the overpopulated country has commuters climbing onto the sides of the train. People have been added to an image of an MRT train approaching a station. The humour is achieved through highlighting of the incongruity of first-world Singapore becoming less-developed like India where people will have to fight to get onto public transport. This is a highly emotional issue for Singaporeans and is designed to arouse fear, since they are already complaining about the overcrowding presently. The copy has just the words "Singapore 2030" in the foreground with no other words, giving it a feel of a prophetic announcement that invites no deliberation. The choice of including Indians in the image also appeals to the xenophobic sentiments that is increasing as a result of the influx of foreigners from India. This too is a highly emotive appeal.



Figure 5.9: Meme 9 – Are you ready for 6.9 million people in Singapore 2030.

Meme 13 (Figure 5.10) was published the next day and continues with the theme of overcrowded public transportation, this time the buses. The technique is similar – the image of Indian men hanging from the back of a train has been added to the image of a bus. The selection of an SMRT bus instead of a bus belonging to the other bus company, the Singapore Bus Service (SBS), may be intentional as the former have had worse public relations with commuters due to their more frequent train failure (see Chapter 4). The copy “Singapore 2030” is repeated but accompanied by the reminder “6.9 million people” and the warning “Are you ready?” This rhetorical question, apart from being portentous and fear arousing, leads the audience to the obvious answer “no” after looking at the image of the bus that comes between the copies. The direction of the composition moves distinctly from top left to bottom right.



Figure 5.10: Meme 13: Are you ready overcrowded bus.

Meme 19 (Figure 5.11) was published on 2 February, and appears to be a follow-up to Memes 15 and 16, both of which were variations of the multi-level bus but of SBS's buses rather than SMRT's. No captions have been added, just the image of a double-decked SBS bus with an extended rear section joined to it, much like the bendy buses that SMRT favours. It may be noteworthy to mention that only SBS has double-deck buses whereas SMRT uses long, bendy buses but no double-deckers. This meme is not hyperbole as the previous triple-decker image and seems more like a variation on the visual theme. It also does not have the incongruity and so the humour's barb to it. Instead an almost conversation-like interaction is forming between the memes. Without any caption, there is no overt ideological message present. Instead it appears to be exploring ways that might be able to alleviate the anticipated congestion. Nonetheless, it no less taps into the underlying fear of the audience of what might happen in the event a population explosion does occur.



Figure 5.11: Meme 19 – The real double decker bendy bus to prepare for 2030.

Meme 24 (Figure 5.12) is a screen shot taken from a TV news bulletin of Dr Amy Khor, the mayor of a Southwest township. The choice of the frame was intentionally unflattering, taken of the moment her eyes were mid-way between a blink, and just as she was saying something that resulted in downturned lips. The effect was that of a cruel character. The copy was an excerpt taken from her

speech, which when taken on its own, suggests that she is telling local Singaporeans that they could “pack up and leave Singapore” same as the new citizens whose loyalty is being questioned.

This first image is juxtaposed with a photo of a child dragging her little trolley bag while drinking from a milk bottle. At the bottom is the text #kthkbye, which is the Internet/Twitter abbreviation for “Okay, thanks. Good bye”. The child’s nonchalant pose, with her back turned to the camera and walking away down a street suggests a careless response to the minister’s suggestion that they leave, by either in defiance, or taking up her challenge as if this was no big deal. Visually, there is also a disconnect between the two as if she is talking over the top of these people.



Figure 5.12: Meme 24 – Since you say until Singaporeans can just pack up and leave.

The four memes relating to various modes of public transportations match the audience's anxiety over a crowded Singapore affectively in very real and tangible ways, unlike the five least popular memes, which were more cognitively structured. The fifth portraying Minister Khor sets up a bully-underdog dialectic that extracts feelings of anger and indignation. It is reasonable to surmise that all five memes are highly affective in their persuasive appeals. Beyond SGAG's exploitation of these emotions, it is also revealing that SGAG's artists, to be able to identify and depict these sentiments in such a meaningful way, place themselves squarely in the midst of the audience, that is to say, they identify

with their viewers closely. Barry Schmelly (2013) corroborated this observation when he revealed that the original 9GAG company from the US tried to set up a site for Singapore but were not able to sustain the operation because they were not “insiders” who understand the psyche of Singaporeans.

5.3.1.2.3 Audience

The socio-economic demographic profile, as well as the race, gender and age of the members of the community who view SGAG Singapore’s posts, are relevant factors for examination and consideration. Singapore is a highly racialised society, which is, it must be clarified, not the same as a

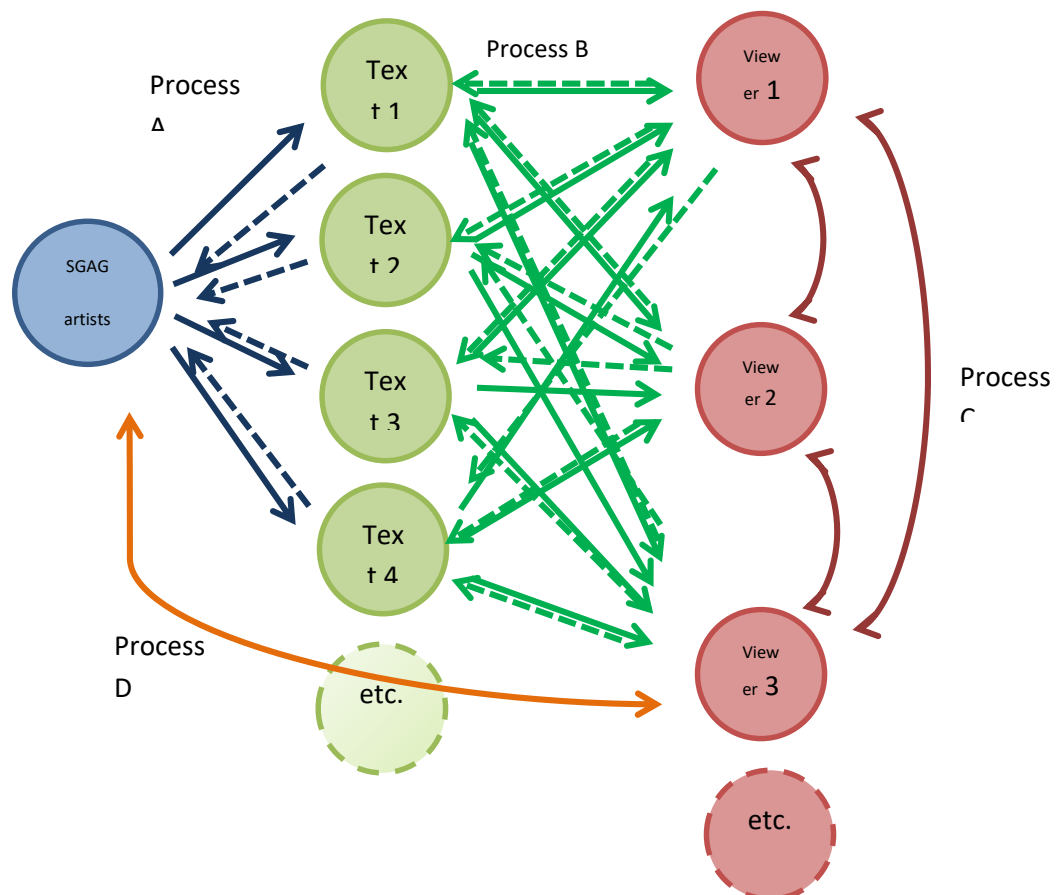


Figure 5.13: Communication processes.

racist society. (By common dictionary definition³⁷ “racist” is an attitude that sees some races as

³⁷ Oxford dictionary defines racism as “The belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races” (see <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/racism>).

superior to others, whereas “racialised” describes an outlook or attitude where race is often, if not always, a factor to be considered in everyday interactions. This awareness of race can be benevolent and does not necessarily carry any sinister intention. Such an attitude comes from years of social conditioning that different races exhibit certain stereotypical traits that one ought to be aware of when interacting with each other.) However, the nature of online communities, especially in a socio-political page like SGAG in the sensitive context of Singapore, means verifying the identity of the members is not always possible or accurate. A number of posters do use what appears to be their real names, like “Benjamin Chan” or “Syed Abdul Rahman” from which the ethnicity and gender is more apparent. However, other ethnic names like “Chi Sao” and “Lee Rou Xuan”, or nicknames like “Königstiger Vib Lee” and “Apez Chucky” provide few clues and render any effort to include such profiles into the study as unhelpful as it is a bit nebulous in terms of the text-focused approach the thesis has taken and another study using other approaches would be needed to say anything with confidence. Thus further academic inquiry into the properties of the audience along this line will neither be feasible nor of value at this point even though it is important to acknowledge this factor as relevant in the light of the historical and social context.

5.3.2 Processes

The processes within the SGAG Singapore site are examined to find “meaningful interconnections that fuse acts into actions” (Ang & Nadarajan, 1995, p. 28) for example, whether there are any levelling effects, how commentators take turns, or how power is exerted or negotiated. At least four processes were identified in this case study. The diagram in Figure 5.13 illustrates the communicative processes between the sender and receivers. Drawing from the constructionist perspective, a process of joint meaning-making can be seen between all parties.

Members the of SGAG Singapore team produce a meme (Process A) relating to a current issue, to which different members of the community respond according to their own interpretation (Process B). Their interpretation (broken green arrows) may or may not correspond with what the producers have in mind (solid green arrows). Analysing the comments, there was evidence that the various members of the

community (V1, V2, V3, etc.) interact with each other to either build upon the meaning of the meme, or to expand their understanding of the topic (Process C). Occasionally, direct feedback (Process D) is given to SGAG, which then produces a new meme to start the process all over again. There are also times when SGAG producers directly interact with the viewers to give their opinions overtly and directly. When viewers interact with each other in Process C they are indirectly feeding information back to SGAG (broken blue arrows). This is because SGAG monitors the comments. The analysis of processes identifies the production of these humour memes on SGAG as a complex collaborative and non-linear process with no traditional gatekeepers. SGAG has a rhetorical intention and remains as the primary agenda setter of the discourse but viewers do influence SGAG's choice of material to some degree. Bottom-up processes have been found but are relatively rare. The processes also showcase the social function of humour as it creates Kuiper's (2008) "solidarity, social acceptance and approval, shared experiences and identity building within a group" (pp. 368-370) and provides some evidence of this site acting as a smaller Habermas's metaphoric "working room" (Buturoiu, 2014, p. 47) within the Singapore public sphere. There was no evidence of humour being used by SGAG as a form of activism. Instead, it functioned like Davies (2007) predicted: as a thermometer rather than a thermostat.

5.3.2.1 Process A – production of image

The process of creating the memes can be determined to a large extent through a more detailed look at the earlier analysis of the meme's communication properties. Unfortunately, unless one was present at the point of the creation of the images, it is not possible to trace the progression of the process.

However, it is my proposition that an important component of the process is the identification of subjects for the memes that resonates with the audience. Jenks (1995, p. 1) had argued that visual messages intuitively move people. In the earlier properties analysis (see 5.3.1.2 Memes) it was noted that the more popular memes had content that appealed to emotions, whereas the less popular ones employed more logical reasoning.

By using images of overcrowded MRT trains and buses set in an easily identifiable Singapore context, for example, HDB buildings in the background, the meme creator makes the MRT a symbol of what

they perceive as wrong with the country. The producers managed to tap onto existing sentiments that are most keenly felt by the audience with regards to the prevailing socio-political issues. This could help explain the popularity or virality of this set of memes. The sentiments are best characterised as fear and indignation. In a later follow-up interview, co-founder of SGAG, Barry Schmelly (2016), explained that a topic must capture the imagination of meme creators, otherwise, any image they produce will be mere “surface posters” that have no depth. By tapping into viewers’ emotions, their concerns, fear, anger and disappointment are roused. My analysis of the memes has identified the trigger points in the next few sections to be the likeliest to resonate with the audience. The analysis of their comments supports the argument that these themes embedded in the memes are indeed what agitated the audience. The assumption here was posited earlier that “comments are a window to the inner workings of the audiences’ minds” (Gearhart & Kang, 2014).

It had been noted earlier that comments form a basic analytical unit of this study. Although predominantly at home in Process C, and sometimes B, there is a certain amount of fluidity and overlap. The means by which the memes are produced cannot be ascertained without external input, meaning, unless an opportunity to be present at the point of creation was available and I were privy to the discussion surrounding the design, the actual Process A cannot be ascertained conclusively. However indirect inference through the observation of the symbolic elements within the memes, coupled with the audience reactions (in the form of comments) we can extrapolate the rhetorical intention of the producer even when the precise authorial intent cannot be determined (see 2.4 Conclusion). The following subsections highlight the dominant themes that make up several threads running through many of the memes. It is my argument that SGAG exploited these themes by tapping into the polarities of views to draw in audiences. Studying the memes against the comments will shed insight into how SGAG constructed their rhetorical message and possibly why as well.

5.3.2.1.1 Overcrowding

Despite the government’s assurance that Singapore can cope with the increase in population, this runs against the daily experience of the ordinary Singaporean, be it in the competition for jobs, housing, or

a seat on the bus and MRT. This was used by SGAG to good effect, evident in Meme 1, which depicted people falling over a cliff; Memes 3, 8 and 20, which utilised the code of sardines squeezed into a small can; and competition for housing (Memes 5, 7), MRT (Memes 4, 6, 9, 25), buses (Memes 6, 13, 15, 16, 19); and public space (Meme 14)³⁸. Comments by viewers such as the following reinforce this observation. (All excerpts from viewers' comments have been left unedited and names have been removed to keep their identities anonymous.)

- Imagine 9,718 people living upon you per square km.

30 January at 15:20 · Like · 2

This commentator made a factual point to express anxiety over the large average number of people per square km.

- in 2030 we get to smell each other armpits everywhere we go.....niceee

30 January at 15:24 · Like · 9

This commentator expressed a common concern that the cramped conditions in the trains are made less bearable when the weather is hot and commuters are sweaty. The air-conditioning may not be adequate to cope with the extra load and the invasion of personal space results in unpleasant experiences relating to body odours. Such petty concerns can only be born from past experience of the commuters and illustrate very real fears that their personal space will be further invaded with an increase in population.

- Singapore's carrying capacity is reaching its limit, but I'm already at my limits!

30 January at 00:00 · Like

The frustration of this last commentator supports the inference that SGAG was tapping the sentiments of commuters who are fearful and fed up that the infrastructure of Singapore cannot cope with more people. It connects powerfully with the fear of the loss of personal space that commentators have personally experienced.

³⁸ See Appendix: SGAG Memes for full set of memes.

5.3.2.1.2 *Foreigners – China/India/Filipino*

The producers appear to be exploiting a growing resentment towards the influx of foreigners. Many PRCs³⁹ have obtained scholarships and citizenships, and are competing with the locals for jobs, especially at the PMET⁴⁰ level. Commentators responding to Meme 14 used the derogatory term to call the PRCs “Ah Tiong”, which is from the Hokkien dialect term for China, Tionggok. The meme juxtaposed an artist impression of a serene seaside development with SGAG’s own interpretation of how the reality would look, namely jam-packed with people. One commentator remarked that it looked like the seaside promenade was full of PRCs. The picture itself did not depict PRCs in any sort of derogatory way.

- Wa so many Tiongs!!
31 January at 13:16 via mobile · Like · 8

The only other PRC reference would be Meme 12, which also did not appear to be portraying PRCs negatively either. Lulu is a comedic character from a locally produced television show and SGAG appeared to have borrowed her to make a point, which is to guard themselves against becoming a minority in their own country, Singaporeans need to emulate the more populous PRCs, hence Lulu’s reference to the sexual act.

Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis as the subject can be seen in Texts 6, 9, 13. The images borrowed from photographs of these populous and crowded countries easily found on the Internet, where the masses often hang precariously from the doors of buses, trains and other public transport, climb through the windows to board and even sit atop the vehicles. Viewers latched on to this depiction and imagined Singapore as devolving to become a less developed country:

- Bangalapore/Cheenapore/Singapinoy.
30 January at 15:19 · Like · 4
- singapore become india..... ><
30 January at 15:10 · Like · 6

³⁹ This is a common abbreviation used to refer to Chinese people from the People’s Republic of China, as opposed to Singapore Chinese born and raised in Singapore.

⁴⁰ Professionals, managers, executives and technicians.

- singapore will evolved into chinapore/indiapore/uspore

30 January at 15:16 · Like · 11

At least one commentator jokingly accused SGAG of being racist.

- only indians at the back clinging on the train.. so racist LOL

30 January at 15:21 · Like · 4

However, only 3 out of the 8 images 4, 6, 9, 13, 15, 16, 19, 25 showing forms of public transportations coping badly with crowds, depicted Indians clinging onto buses and trains, which seem to suggest the racial portrayal was incidental rather than intentional. Meme 25 rendered a scene inside an MRT train full of contortionists, presumably to show that commuters too must be contortionist to cope with the crowded situation. Although two dominant figures in the picture were obviously Chinese, an allusion to China's famous acrobats and pugilists, a closer look will reveal that the other contortionists were from various ethnicities. Therefore, it is unlikely that xenophobia is SGAG's communicative purpose but rather, crowdedness is their real focus. The xenophobic sentiments were ascribed onto the images by the viewers, which highlights how the audience can project their own interpretations onto these visual humour texts.

- fuck of foreigners

30 January at 18:15 · Like · 1

Although no Filipinos were depicted in any of the memes, some extended the xenophobia narrative to the increase in the number of Filipinos domestic helpers as well as those taking on IT and medical roles as well, which further illustrates how a picture can lead to readings that are not found within the memes themselves:

- Man dun forget the pinoys and others uprising...

31 January at 13:19 · Like · 6

The following commentator complained that local Singaporeans are a minority in their own land, which is a sentiment that appears to be a more accurate reflection of SGAG's intended message.

- Foreigners controlling your motherland sounds interesting....then sporeans should move to another country....

30 January at 18:39 via mobile · Like · 3

- I like the * - very foreigner-friendly.

30 January at 18:40 · Like

Certain readings available in the text, particularly the race-based readings, emphasised not just that it would be crowded like trains in a poor country but that Singapore would end up like third-world India. People are reading the pictures of crowding in terms of a whole wider set of prejudgements about India, for example, that it is dirty or backward. This could reflect my earlier argument that an element of pride and indignation is involved, as Singaporeans are used to the idea that their country ranks among top in many areas (airport, shipping port, economy, etc.). However, a survey of the SGAG memes did not reveal overt racist or xenophobic messages, and the highlighting of racial stereotypes were framed in quite neutral, as-a-matter-of-fact terms. Viewers, however, read them as strong emotional responses that may or may not have been the intention of SGAG.

Another theme that ran through some of the images touched on Singapore's low reproduction rate, with 20 per cent of the memes (2, 10, 11, 12, 18 and 23) referencing this issue. The viewers' comments resonated with this resentment towards the repeated government reminder to increase the national fertility rate. SGAG's memes argued logically and sarcastically against the high cost of living, the long working hours, as well as the stressful education system that makes having children a luxury only the rich can afford. This view ties in with opposition MP Gerald Giam's opinion that the government was using the low birth rate as an excuse to bring in more immigrants to sustain the economy (Giam, 2011). The resentment is echoed in these two comments on 30 January:

- Cross breed the PAP MPs offspring lor.
They are damn rich to afford a soccer team of children.
They are damn talented so their kids also super gifted.
They are so rich that they will hang out at their atas [lofty] place and leave our peasants hangout alone.
They have cars so no crowding of public transport.
Most will purebred Singaporeans with our culture.. though with some air of arrogance but we are use to it anyway.
They are the reservoir of talents for PAP to tap on for future GOS. No worries about losing power.
What are we waiting for?
Let the sex begin.
30 January at 15:41 · Edited · Like · 17
- It's just an excuse for the foreign talent issues. If they take care of our living standards well, we will be able to make babies lor.
30 January at 17:02 via mobile · Like · 15

This is a common argument, that the high cost of living is not conducive for starting a family, which is why Singaporeans are reluctant to have children. The rhetorical message of SGAG's memes appears congruent with viewers' perspective. One commentator noted that the costs begin at the wedding, and stretches to housing:

- pay for wedding, go broke,
pay for house lagi broke,
use what to pay for babies?
\$6.9 million divide over couple with no children, maybe got babies? lol
30 January at 17:56 · Like · 5

The babies issue appears to be firmly on SGAG's agenda as it highlights the irony between the pleasure of sex that has now become a chore and a burden. SGAG mocks politicians' failure to deal with the problem of falling birth rates and presents an alternative interpretation of the root cause.

5.3.2.1.3 Government not listening

One theme that is prominent in the comments is the lack of consultation by the government. However, when viewed against the actual memes (2, 10, 11, 12, 18 and 23), SGAG only hinted at this issue. Most notable were memes 2, 10, 11 and 12. In memes 2 and 10, both of which utilised the same format of a three-panelled stock cartoon strip of a boardroom discussion with the speech balloons changed to render a contextualised argument. Meme 11 was a 4-panel strip taken from the scene of the movie *300* (2006).

Some commentators are puzzled why the government is not exercising what they see as common sense. This commentator remarked that people making comments on Facebook are "smart", implying that the comments make sense. Meme 12 was, of course, the Lulu meme mentioned earlier. All of these memes obliquely suggested this problem of the government's neglect to consider citizens' viewpoint. This was done by illustrating how a different conversation could have led to alternative solutions. Viewers latched on to these hints and expanded on them, leading to one opining that netizens are coming up with suggestions that are better than what the "scholars" (a common reference to the ministers who were mostly recipients of government scholarships) can come up with. The \$2 million reference is to the high salaries they are being paid and the suggestion the ministers split it

with the FB (Facebook) netizens suggest the existence of a measure of scorn and antipathy towards the ministers, who are regarded as not worth what they are being paid.

- I agree wt Geoffrey. If they take time to read FB comments, they will be surprise at some of the suggestions the netizens come up wt and put those scholars to shame. Now, split ur \$2m among the FB netizens pls. Thk u.
2 February at 01:50 · Like · 2

The train memes brought to some commentators' minds how experts in the past have already anticipated and warned of the problems of overcrowding in the trains.

- You can't say it is squeezezy...it's a problem that will come sooner or later. Experts have already thought of that 10 years back.
2 February at 01:41 · Like

The following commentator suggest that the idea by the “experts in PAP” (with full irony) of bringing in immigrants is a feasible solution to the low birth rate, and consequently the low manpower needed to sustain the economy.

- and the experts in PAP decided that bringing in more foreign thrash would solve the problem.. wtf??
30 January at 19:24 via mobile · Like · 9

There is a sense of helplessness that no matter how they try to raise their concerns and objections, the government will bulldoze its way through, and the citizens will have to bear with the negative consequences.

- The govt doesnt listen shit about our concerns.. we will sure have to face on with the dreaded decision.
30 January at 02:32 via mobile · Like · 4

A root of this unhappiness with the government leaders is the fact that Singapore ministers are the highest paid in the world. SGAG made a direct reference to this in Meme 10 with one cartoon character stating bluntly “How about you impregnate more women since you earn 2 million per year?” so it is clear the ministers' pay is on their agenda. The brief mentions and backhanded hints of this issue in the memes were able to stir a vigorous debate, which highlights the principle of “less is

more” favoured by the minimalists, who are of the opinion that basic-level terms are optimally informative as they do not incur higher processing costs (Shintel, H., & Keysar, B., 2009).

5.3.2.1.4 Summary

SGAG’s principle for choosing topics that “has to be relevant to your audience” was confirmed by the Similarweb (2016) report. SGAG was not averse to tapping into underlying fears of their audience while keeping the message light-hearted. Schmelly confirmed that SGAG had an agenda to educate people on the socio-political issues and the topics chosen are deliberately critical. He explained that to be successful, the meme producers “must have the pulse of the local events” (Barry Schmelly, 2013). He supported his claim by pointing to the failure of 9GAG⁴¹ (the US-based company) to enter into the Singapore market. The “less is more” principle worked well in providing commentators room to fill in their own experiences and interpretations, which led to an expansive online discussion, although it has the potential disadvantage of the conversation running away in a direction that the producers may not anticipate, as can be seen with the xenophobic rant that developed. Schmelly, in the interview, insisted that path was as was not planned. The memes’ lack of strong xenophobic elements appears to validate his claim.

At this point in the thesis, the analysis of Process A is admittedly limited by the lack of a more sensitive analytical tool that can help illuminate more fully how the memes are produced. Further research is required to better understand Process A and this will be a primary focus of the next case study in Chapter 6.

5.3.2.2 Process B – decoding images

The consumption of humour is a social act. As argued at the end of Section 2.3.1.4 Limitations of humour theories participation in humour forges social cohesion through the creation of solidarity, shared experiences and the building of an identity within a group. This perspective informs the analysis of the decoding of the memes process, which has found several types of responses that

⁴¹ In the interview Schmelly explained that SGAG approached 9GAG (USA) for permission to use the similar sounding name but received no response from 9GAG. Instead, 9GAG subsequently set up a rival site in Singapore to vie for the same market but dropped out subsequently. The veracity of this claim cannot be ascertained but I do remember noting in the early days of the data collection period there was an inconsistency in the naming of the memes that were circulated. Later on, SGAG adopted the watermarking of all their memes, which made the source of the memes a lot more distinct.

conform to these characteristics. In general, there are those who agree, those who disagree, those who did not understand what the producer meant or chose to interpret the image differently, and finally, those who are hijacked by certain elements within the image and take off at a tangent. Each of these groups' responses is analysed in turn.

It needs to be noted, at this point, how the analysis of Process B, the decoding of images, is fundamentally different to how the comments were viewed in the earlier section as part of the Process An analysis of the image production. In Process A, the viewers pointed back towards the memes to shed light on what they meant. Process B is focused on

1. Why a comment is posted?
2. What is being conveyed through the comment?
3. How is this conveyed?

The findings point to what motivates commentators to post their views and what this achieves.

Consumption of humour is as a social act, as people like to laugh with others. Laughing alone is akin to someone talking to oneself and is generally considered not normal. Commentators contribute to this social involvement with humour by agreeing or disagreeing with the depictions within the memes. At times, a viewer's lack of contextual cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) prevented their access to the oppositional scripts necessary for seeing the incongruities that leads to the appreciation of the humour.

5.3.2.2.1 Agreement

From the social functionalist viewpoint, humour is a social act of sharing that builds solidarity and social cohesion. This is manifestly seen in the high number of agreement responses in the comments, through the use of various forms of Internet short-cuts to express laughter and emotions as well as participation.

5.3.2.2.2 Laughing along

Coser (1959, p. 171) had argued that laughter is a "communicative relationship" that must be shared. Laughing out loud alone is socially unacceptable, similar to talking to oneself. We see a mediation of this in the data, as some meme viewers, the majority of whom are presumably consuming the humour

alone through their individual devices, feel the need to express their laughter. This is effected through the use of a simple “haha” and its variations, or emoticons and this agreement aligns them with aspects of the message, so they are affiliating with the mockery, derision and so on.⁴² The most common Internet abbreviation is “lol” (laugh out loud), which has been manipulated into various dimensions of intensity, including the use of exclamation marks (single or multiple), capital letters, which is equivalent to shouting, ellipsis or multiple vowels to indicate prolonged or sustained laughter. The use of various intensifying methods also hints at a certain competitiveness, as if to establish their social status, similar to Coser’s (1959) study of hospital patients who used humour to elevate their low position in the hospital hierarchy.

- Lol!
30 January at 18:37 · Like
- LOL....
30 January at 17:19 · Like · 2
- Lol!!
5 February at 00:58 via mobile · Like
- LOOOOOOOOOOOOOOL
5 February at 01:02 · Like

On only one occasion did a commentator use “lmao” to represent “laugh my ass off”

- the cute girl at the bottom walks off like a boss lmao xD
6 February at 23:18 · Like

There are those which came with a compliment or a positive word attached to show their appreciation:

- sibeh creative lol
30 January at 17:00 · Like · 1
- hahaha! good one
29 January at 23:15 · Like
- Bahahahaha.. this cracks me up! Now I'm awake after a sleepy lunch. XD
29 January at 16:26 via mobile · Like

⁴² These agreements are common in Facebook and do not seem more likely to occur in any type of post in this case study. Examining the top 5 popular memes the laughing-along form of agreement are roughly 10-16% of the comments in memes 4, 9, 13 and 19, with only 1% for meme 24. It needs to be noted that the number of comments for the popular memes is higher (between 106-145) and the discussion generated are comparatively more substantial compared to the least popular ones (memes 12, 17, 22, 23 and 26), which range between 6-20 comments.

- this picture is so funny - I was laughing the whole day!!!!
31 January at 14:32 · Like
- The use of a simple laughing “haha” onomatopoeia did not appear to have as many variations as “laugh out loud” and different intensities were achieved through the repetition of the laughing “ha” with the occasional exclamation marks at the endhaha
30 January at 19:55 · Like
- hahaha
30 January at 15:11 · Like · 2
- Hahahahahahahahah!!!!
1 February at 21:05 via mobile · Like

The sound is sometimes represented differently, but with the same effect.

- wkawkawkawka,
30 January at 15:13 · Like
- WAKAKAKAKAKAKAKAJA
30 January at 20:31 via mobile · Like

More common was the attachment of some form of highlight to point out what was specifically found to be funny. This again is a way to use laughter to assert a particular interpretation. This commentator found the population figure 6.9 [million] to be the funny point.

- Hahahaha 6.9 ..
29 January at 23:43 via mobile · Like

On the other hand this commentator found the idea of Singapore being likened to sardines funny:

- Singapore macam Sadin! Hahaha
31 January at 16:57 via mobile · Like · 1

Others responded to the message of the image by offering and verbalising their thoughts and feelings:

- Sad...
31 January at 04:51 via mobile · Like
- Boooo
5 February at 01:37 via mobile · Like

Endorsement also takes the form of a simple message:

- Seems legit.

31 January at 15:52 · Like

The decoding of the message is an interactive and social process marked by the virtual sharing of laughter (and other emotion), as the audience seeks to be validated as part of the “in” group that gets the joke. There is also some degree of self-assertion observed through the use of intensifiers of laughter. The assertion of one’s interpretation is also achieved through the addition of a virtual laugh when making a remark or a point.

5.3.2.2.3 *Extension of humour*

The assertion of oneself, as discussed above, can also be achieved through the extension of the humour through the injection of the viewer’s own humour or thoughts and ideas to build on the original image. The following commentator suggested a video would enhance the humour. The assertion was softened by the suggestion “you forgot” which made it less accusatory towards the producer.

- You forgot to include this sardine video:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8FQsg12hoY> .

This commentator highlighted the number 6.9 to draw a connection to the sexual connotation of the numbers. This was achieved through a mocked tone of innocence, posed as a question. The emoticon xD connotes a cheeky grin, which signals some attempt to be included.

- Why the number 6.9? xD
3 February at 00:27 · Like

The humour can be extended also through the use of irony. When Minister Khaw begged the Worker’s Party not to throw a spanner into the works in Meme 26, this commentator played with the image of the Worker’s Party’s hammer symbol and suggested:

- They throw spanner at you, you throw hammer at them lor... Lol
8 February at 12:09 via mobile · Like · 12

This previous and the following comments' humour was suggestive of some form of passive-aggression. The next commentator used sarcasm to respond to MP Dr Amy Khor's suggestion that Singaporeans can pack up and leave Singapore by pretending to be grateful for the permission granted, and leaving without regrets. There is a tone of mockery in this statement:

- Why, Thank you! me and my brother finally got our wish
6 February at 22:49 · Like · 3

A variation of this was the use of a video link which showed a man waving and saying "Goodbye"

- K lor.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUI9NPPMx8s>
- Bye, Have a Great Time!
- www.youtube.com
- Bye, have a great time
- 7 February at 16:20 · Like

Another response to Dr Amy Khor's image was a witty analogy. Unlike some other commentators' crude and vulgar description of her looks, this commentator used a simile. The reference to the Chinese New Year songs, a phenomenon similar to the incessant broadcast of Christmas carols in public places in December, has a hint of social bond building done by means of a shared experience. Anyone who has suffered the bombardment of the CNY songs during the season will share the same knowledge of how the music can drive one to distraction.

- Her face looks like she has been listening to mediacorp CNY songs 24/7 for the past month
6 February at 22:53 via mobile · Like · 28

Internet meme expressions were also employed by commentators, for example, the variation of the "go home, you are drunk" phrase which was used here for Dr Amy Khor's statement. This is another shared joke that, if understood or accepted, grants one the status of being an insider.

- Go home khor...u r drunk..
6 February at 23:22 via mobile · Like · 2
- go home amy khor,you're drunk
7 February at 01:04 · Like · 8

For the same reason commentators also drew from the world of gaming to describe her action as tyrannical. This is drawn from the levels of difficulties in online games, for instance, *Diablo*, which classified difficulty levels as easy, moderate or hard, or assigned a number or status, like professional, amateur, etc.

- Tyranny level over 9000...
7 February at 03:40 via mobile · Like

Word-play is also seen in a number of examples. Puns like “fishy” when commenting on the image that portrayed Singapore now as a tin of sardines has the double meaning of suspicious action on the part of the government:

- Haha no wonder fishy
5 February at 20:52 via mobile · Like

This commentator played with Dr Amy Khor’s name, which is pronounced as the IPA⁴³: *kor*

- We'll Khor-rect her very soon...!
7 February at 00:36 · Like · 9

Singaporeans’ affinity⁴⁴ for acronyms and abbreviation is exploited in this comment when the ruling People’s Action Party’s abbreviation, PAP is given a different interpretation:

- PAP model = Pay and Pay model
5 February at 18:24 · Like · 1

Word play like this demonstrates the social cohesiveness created by a joke based on shared knowledge or cultural capital and this orientation to collective resources in the responses makes the humour a shared and collaborative experience that edges towards a collective action or politics.

Commentators sometimes put on characters or roles to play out the drama of a response. In this comment, the role is a recruiter from Hong Kong enticing the disgruntled Singaporean to leave the country and join them in Hong Kong where the grass is greener. This form of play seems to have a

⁴³ International Phonetic Alphabets.

⁴⁴ See <http://mothership.sg/2014/11/10/acronyms-only-singaporeans-can-come-up-with/>
<https://hiddensingapore.com/2011/12/10/acronyms-in-singapore/>
<http://www.angmohdan.com/singaporeans-love-initialisms/>

strong and specific message that compares Hong Kong with Singapore, presumably to hold Hong Kong as a better model than Singapore.

- Come to Hong Kong. We welcome bright minds of any nation. Web enthusiast can send their CV. Can get your work permit sorted in 1 week.

7 February at 03:02 via mobile · Like · 1

Yet another form of the dramatic role-playing is the parody from the movie 300 where Leonidas' war cry was "This is Sparta!" This commentator reproduced the war cry in response to Meme 1 which had people falling off a cliff as soldiers advanced and edged them over. The supposed sound effect is intended to be amusing. However, apart from the shared cultural trope (in the form of a popular movie) the people falling over the cliff also forebode a grim future for Singapore.

- THIS IS SPARTAN!!!!

21 January at 14:23 via mobile · Like

In this conversation, one commentator made a suggestion that a local YouTube celebrity, Steven Lim, sings the words to the lyrics in Meme 20, which is a parody of a patriotic song. The response was jocular and good natured.

- Get Steven Lim to sing it.

8 February at 02:06 · Like · 7

This elicited a friendly rebuttal that signals a viewer-to-viewer interaction. There is clearly a shared moment here, illustrating the social cohesion notion proposed by Coser.

- If is Steven lim rapping this, they won't listen... HAha.

8 February at 02:22 via mobile · Like · 1

Two responses to Meme 5, which depicted future housing going underground, jokingly referenced the 18-levels of hell in Chinese mythology:

- anyway, that look a bit like 18層地獄See Translation

29 January at 17:58 · Like · 5

- We have got plenty. 18 levels of hell.

29 January at 19:28 via mobile · Like · 3

This commentator utilised a narrative device by posting an imagined conversation of an American student and teacher discussing Singapore's plan to build underground:

- somewhere in America elementary sch grade 3,
Student:where is Singapore
Teacher:Singapore is living underground
Student:why must the people live underground?
Teacher:Government keeps rising the economy
Student:So that's why.
29 January at 18:11 · Like · 12

The use of funny or rude phrases in local dialects is also popular. LPPL is the abbreviation for a humorous but vulgar phrase that carries the meaning of being back to square one.

- THIS IS CALLED LPPL
5 February at 16:27 · Like

The above examples reveal how online humour is able to build a shared experience through the mediated network of individuals. Another notable observation on the comments is the many references to humour elsewhere on the net, for example, 9GAG, or popular culture such as film, to validate the meme. Commentators could be making judgments on the funniness of the memes using other humour texts as a sort of standard by fitting them into this category or that, and in so doing locate their places in those contexts, as well as funniness.

5.3.2.2.4 *Emoticons*

Research has shown that interpersonal behavioural patterns extend to our interaction with computers (Derks, Fischer, & Bos, 2008; Polzin, 2000; Rezabek & Cochenour, 1998) so it was inevitable that non-verbal cues were incorporated into online communication. This case study took place before the existence of the emoji⁴⁵ buttons widely available today. Emotional responses then were expressed by typing letters to represent facial expression to add hints about the commentators' mood. For example,

⁴⁵ Emoticons uses basic texts while emojis are actual pictures. See <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/feb/06/difference-between-emoji-and-emoticons-explained>

viewed sideways, the X in XD represents the eyes scrunched up, and the D a broad grin. The mouth can also be replaced by a V to indicate an open mouth.

- Bahahahaha.. this cracks me up! Now I'm awake after a sleepy lunch. XD
29 January at 16:26 via mobile · Like
- Why the number 6.9? xD
3 February at 00:27 · Like
- Lol lens backfired :V
8 February at 02:22 via mobile · Like

Sometimes two “mouths” are added for emphasis.

- yup...we r all like-aholics xDD
5 February at 01:09 · Like · 1

The wide-eyed look is achieved with zeros, with a dot for the nose, or a dash for the mouth.

- shit just got real 0.0
2 February at 11:36 · Like · 1
- Is that a big old TYPEWRITER?? O_O!! lol
7 February at 15:49 · Like · 8.

Other emoticons used include the sad face,

- >that feel
:((((((((
30 January at 15:18 · Like

Only a narrow range of emoticons were used in the comments in this study and they are mostly of the smiling, laughing or grinning variety. Sometimes sad faces or the wide-eyed emoticon were used to express disappointment, wonderment or incredulity. Their use signals the need of the viewers to share feelings or emotions similar to offline communication where such non-verbal cues express sincerity, build and maintain relationships and increase social intimacy. Contra research by Tossell et al. (2012) suggesting negative emoticons as more prevalent than positive, in this case study, the smiley face and its variations form the overwhelming majority. The correlation to the humour is a likely explanation, despite the negativity behind some of the issues that can breed anger and frustration. The humorous

contexts of the memes appear to be the overriding factor in determining the mood of the viewers and also their affiliation to each other, as they are agreeing with the political jokes, rather than –as is the norm in Singaporean public culture – of frowning at the inappropriateness of laughing about politics. This may be a significant dimension of the consumption of humour in this context.

5.3.2.2.5 *Disagreement*

Not all members of the community agreed every time with the producers. When the first image was released after the DBS Vickers report, this commentator, S, thought SGAG was speculating and took the site to task. The use of three exclamation marks suggests a certain heightened emotional state in S, which raises the question why. Contextually, it would seem to be a defensive response, as if the situation should not be made to look worse than it may be, which would be a form of denial due to the desire to believe that things in Singapore are not as bad as it appears. Alternatively, S could be defending the government and was unwilling to concede that there may be weaknesses in the PAP's policies.

- Please do not speculate [sic] this!!!
21 January at 14:34 via mobile · Like

The response of administrators of SGAG Singapore to S's denial or apologist stance was measured:

- We are not speculating, we are only presenting what's reported in Reuters. Please check description for the article.
21 January at 14:36 · Like · 13

S did not respond to SGAG's reply, which may mean S accepted SGAG's explanation and he stood corrected and in turn this would mean that S's first objection was reactive and not based on facts. Of course, it could also mean that S lacked the confidence or status within SGAG to argue further, or did not wish to escalate the discussion further into argument. Later posts were less kind and labelled S as "dog", a reference to the derogatory Chinese label for traitors as "running dogs". The sequence of posts shows a shift in the argument that is moving away from the image to the attack on a dissenting voice and the dynamics of "othering" emerged, with S being on the side of the White Paper proposal and ordinary Singaporeans who will suffer the consequences of the increased population on the other. Pointing out spelling and grammar mistakes is a common *ad hominem* attack to discredit a dissenter.

- Snoopy Says Dogs bark when they dun understand. Period.

21 January at 14:40 · Like · 1

- S, it's speculate, not speculate. /facepalms

21 January at 14:41 · Like · 5

Not all disagreements are emotional outbursts. The message of one image was challenged using logical reasoning and arguments. The following commentator pointed out the incongruity of increasing benefit while reducing tax:

- How can more benefit and less tax be in the same sentence ?

Math

24 January at 19:58 via mobile · Like

A dialogue developed with another commentator, L, who supported this position by referring to the US federal government which had allegedly tried something similar, i.e. reducing tax and increasing welfare, which resulted in a weak economy.

- the americans think they can do it. welfare + tax cuts.
and they now have a shitty economy.

24 January at 20:03 · Edited · Like · 16

Directing at L, another commentator put forward the argument that despite the US's weak economy, people there enjoy greater freedom and as a result, are happier.

- @L economy may not be as good. but are we truly happy with a ultra crowded population density, no property and no freedom? Do you feel rich? Would you feel that you lived life to the fullest working your whole life?

24 January at 20:11 · Like · 8

Underlying this line of argument is the belief that the Singapore model is superior. The US is often used as an example of how Western models are not as good as Singapore. There is a sense of pride in Singapore's achievement and this pride appears to be a common sentiment. An objection was also raised that the comparison was not workable because it was a case of comparing very different classes of objects that cannot be practically compared:

- u cant compare Singapore with USA/Australia guys, Singapore has a much more smaller land space, even the prices of a flat here can be the same as a landed property in other countries

24 January at 20:13 · Like · 8

Several commentators defended the status quo by choosing to look at the positives of the current Singaporean situation, which has a low personal income tax and goods and services tax. The commentator also believes the government has done its best and the current situation is the best compromise. This is another manifestation of the pride that some have in Singapore and its government. There is also an unquestioning faith that the situation is not simple and that there is no solution. The reasoning is that if there is a solution the government would have “done it”.

- The question is how.. If its so simple they would have done it. How to decrease taxes while maintaining govt expenditure. How decrease cost of living while ensuring sustainable economic progress

24 January at 20:18 via mobile · Like

- Ya actually our tax and gst is still considered low as compared to countries of the same or near our gdp so we complain also abit unfair.

24 January at 20:22 · Like

However, the discussion could not be sustained as very quickly some commentators turned scathing and questioned not just the logic but also attacked other commentators obliquely by implying that they are the product of a failed education system. Rhetorical questions were used to attack the reasoning behind the image which called for a reduction of taxes and an increase of benefit. The argument also attempted to cite empirical data to support its argument and debunk blind faith in the status quo. Strong assertive language was used, like the capitalised imperative “NEVER”, which invited no debate. The “logic please” was condescending, as was the rebuke “Please have substance before you speak” which was directed at J.

- Well. Goes to show how strong our education system is. Taxes for us is income for the government. For benefits, Government need to spend more. If you earn less than usual can you spend more than usual? Logic please.

NEVER compare taxes rates because tax is determined for and by that country and economy. I am so sorry but the intelligence of some can insult humanity. Exchange rate has nothing to do with all this. And the difference is really just a few cents. 1 sgd is 0.77 aussie dollar..if we compare to usd? 0.81. Please have substance before you speak @J

24 January at 20:30 via mobile · Like · 4

One commentator of Meme 13, which depicted Indians hanging on to the top and sides of a bus, took exception to SGAG Singapore's image:

- This shows the racist side of those who made dese pics....

30 January at 20:41 via mobile · Like · 1

The administrators did not defend themselves, but another commentator did instead:

- Coz can find any similar picture from China and Pinoyland. Don't think the creator is being a racist.

30 January at 20:43 via mobile · Like · 4

The memes occasionally provoked disagreement that launched potentially valuable conversations and debates. There is a pervading sense of pride that Singapore is either doing well because of its past success or that Singapore and be doing better, again because of its pass success. I saw no real difference of opinion on this in either camp in this. Instead, the divergence was more in how Singapore can continue to be great, with one side insisting on the status quo while the other believing that more can and should be done. This division results in the Othering of both camps, where labels and other *ad hominem* attacks were used to discredit the other party. As a result, the discourse was generally short-lived and unlikely to have a positive contribution towards a working through of issues and a goal of political consensus (in terms of Habermasian public sphere ideals). It should be noted, however, that the cconsensus achieved through humour here isn't working here to bring people together in shared understanding, but as a needle and weapon of the marginalised and disaffected. At best, then, it is forming a micro-public of those who agree Singapore could be doing better.

5.3.2.2.6 *Incomprehension*

The memes were not always universally understood. This is particularly so when *Hokkien* dialect words were used, which can prompt some genuinely puzzled commentators to ask for clarification.

The use of “LOL” at the end connotes a sense of being apologetic and feeling of sheepishness for not understanding:

- i still learn singlish (singaporean english) , and I wonder know what is Nabei means
LOL
21 January at 15:16 · Like · 1
- Excuze me but what iz the meaning of "LIMPEI" ah??
21 January at 20:18 · Like

The misunderstanding of the memes above reveals a group of viewers who may not be fully embedded in Singaporean cultural references. They appear to appreciate the existence of humour here but are unable to access it due to their lack of knowledge in the references. But incomprehension can also occur in the form of misunderstanding the codes within the message. Instead of seeing the images as jokes, many commentators over-analyse the images and offered suggestions and critical feedback as though the proposed multi-level buses and trains are serious propositions:

- I dun think this will work. In the first place, can it enter the tunnel or not? And dun forget the high center of gravity will cause instability & toppling of the train.
29 January at 16:46 · Edited · Like · 12
- The tunnel need to dig bigger or else cant enter...
29 January at 16:21 · Edited · Like · 3
- Don't think this is gonna happen in Singapore but the stations will be super pack.
Think by then pedestrian walkway also got traffic jam
- 29 January at 21:27 · Like · 1

The latter form of misunderstanding could be explained as due to the recipient’s limited sense of humour but it may be better explained using the humour incongruity theory, where the ability to see two contrasting and incompatible interpretations will give rise to a sense of absurdity. The practical concerns these commentators expressed gave hints that a multi-storeyed train is not impossible provided certain conditions are met (bigger tunnels, lower centre of gravity, or bigger station platforms). In order to see the silliness, there must be recognition of the irrational. In this case, it was not recognised. This unexpected reaction, directed at Meme 4 prompted SGAG to respond:

- 9GAG Singapore I am pleasantly surprised so many of you took our suggestion seriously. Never knew we are held with such high regard in engineering, this is a joke site btw, and this geniuses is a JOKE.

29 January at 17:33 · Like · 13

This was followed by one more post and the comments stopped. Presumably, SGAG's reminded made the viewers realise that they were taking things too seriously and the interest in the meme dropped.

5.3.2.2.7 Deviations

Occasionally, members of the community get side-tracked and go off on a tangent. This was evident in Meme 18, which featured scenes from the movie *Chicken Run (2000)*, but with a caption that related back to Singapore's need for more babies to replace the ageing population, and hence the reference to more eggs. The issue was hijacked by discussion of the movie instead.

- i completely forgot chicken run existed till this post
2 February at 00:50 · Like · 1
- hahahaha...chicken run..very cute movie..
2 February at 00:51 via mobile · Like
- love this movie! LOL!
2 February at 00:55 · Like

The same occurred with the images of the multi-level buses, and trains in Texts 9, 15, 16, and 19.

Members were more intrigued by the details of the image rather than the message encoded therein.

- Someone gonnna crash onto the barricades
30 January at 15:17 via mobile · Like · 9
- Hope those barricades don't give way
30 January at 15:23 via mobile · Like

This commentator was distracted by the sardine brand when responding to Meme 3.

- still prefer fair price sardine brand
29 January at 22:47 via mobile · Like

Relatively rare is a diversion over grammar and misspelling, as these errors tend to be acceptable within the community's practice and custom. One commentator made an exception (as noted above)

when S complained that SGAG Singapore was speculating in Meme 1. S's misspelling of "speculate" as "spectulate" provided ammunition for an attack:

- Sorensen, it's speculate, not spectulate. /facepalms

21 January at 14:41 · Like · 5

This deviation is not unimaginable as viewers interpret the images using their pre-existing schemata or prior knowledge to access the meaning of the memes. By making connections to other things, the viewers reveal an active process of reading, even if they did not remain focused on the topic. The organic way the discourse expanded indicates a certain amount of freedom the commentators had to say or share what immediately came to their mind. The lack of filters to moderate one's own remarks or a gatekeeper who vets what is being posted is both a boon as well as a bane for freedom of expression. The rapid response provided by the Web 2.0 technology makes it easier for anyone to say what they want, resulting in spontaneous deliberations that are more heartfelt, sincere and genuine, regardless of whether it is positive or negative in its mood. On the flip side, the indiscriminate oversharing also results in a profusion of statements that nobody is paying attention to, which in turn results in the useful potentially being lost or dismissed together with the bad.

The data here, in addition to demonstrating that viewers are venting their frustration, also point to a degree of calling out of the government for their lack of understanding the citizens' needs when they propose their policies. Kemp and Blomkamp (2013, pp. 244-245) had argued that political humour engages the public by "questioning claims, examining character and challenging power when misused". Commentators responding to the first meme did not take the reasons given for the White Paper at face value and critically evaluated the government's reasons:

- is all about Corporation greed ,

in the end does the people benefits out of it?

21 January at 14:19 · Like · 2

- benefit construction transportation property n healthcare? wat a fked up reasoning and "calculated" expectation..

21 January at 14:27 · Like · 2

- Singaporean sold out in pursuit of \$\$\$\$. A country is not about GDP. It is about people living happily in that country.

Who benefits when we are at 7mil? Foreigners and our government

21 January at 14:31 · Edited · Like · 12

Those responding to Meme 24, which depicted Minister Dr Amy Khor telling Singaporeans that “As much as any NEW citizen could pack up and leave Singapore, SO could any other (local born) Singaporean” questioned Khor’s credibility to speak for Singaporeans as she herself was not born in Singapore. By extension, it also questioned her loyalty as a Singaporean:

- That’s words for u.. From a non-local born..

February at 22:55 · Like · 1

- Wait, what? She was not even born in singapore?!

February at 22:56 via mobile · Like · 2

- If foreigners can come to our country and be a minister, i dont see a reason why local minorities cant even serve the air force and navy.

6 February at 23:05 · Like · 27

While Khor was the only politician who was vilified other ministers were also mentioned by name, including the Prime Minister. Meme 20 (see Figure 5.14a), similar to Meme 26 in terms of its property, was a fake petition that was tagged to the PM’s Facebook page. In contrast to Khor’s, the humour directed at the PM was gentler. The meme was also different as it was a screen shot of SGAG’s trolling the Prime Minister’s Facebook page. It recorded the successive increases in the likes their post received. Khaw Boon Wan, the Minister for National Development at the time of this case study was also targeted. SGAG posted a meme (see Figure 5.14b) that parodied a speech Khaw gave in Parliament by turning his words back at him. Both these memes were different to the other memes in this series as they were using words rather than a composite of pictures rendered with Photoshop to achieve the humorous effect.



Figure 5.14: Meme 20 PM Lee Petition (left) & Meme 26 Khaw Boon Wan's plea (right).

The only other mentions of ministers and politicians were found in a comment in Meme 4.

- I know TCH, TSL & Michael Palmer sure can dig taller & wider tunnels cos they dig a good job in Pasir Ris Punggol's PA

29 January at 16:31 · Like

TCH are the initials for Teo Chee Hean, the country's Deputy Prime Minister at the time of writing.

Michael Palmer was a disgraced MP who resigned over an extra-marital affair. TSL are likely the initials of Teo Ser Luck, another PAP parliamentarian. It is interesting that comments targeting the PAP ministers are infrequent and only initials were used, almost as if in whispered hushed tones out of fear. There is a contrast too in the harshness directed at Amy Khor, and the possibility that this is because she is a woman cannot be dismissed. Furthermore, there is still a certain amount of respect

reserved for the more senior ministers like the Prime Minister, Teo Chee Hean and Khaw Boon Wan.

As a matter of fact, one commentator even posted in response to Meme 26 the following:

- I think KBW is already much better than his pre-decessor....

8 February at 15:22 · Like · 4

Khaw was a minister who held a good track record as the Minister of Health before he was appointed to the National Development portfolio to rectify the policy flaws pertaining to public housing that surfaced during his predecessor's tenure. Public housing, commonly referred to as HDB⁴⁶, was another hotbed issue that had been contributing to the increasingly angry online buzz. (See 4.3.4.1 SMRT problem affected all segments of society).

Direct public criticism of leaders in the instances within this case study is generally muted, with the exception of those targeting Minister Amy Khor in Meme 24. A likely reason is the way the meme was framed, with an unflattering shot of her midway through a blink and her mouth frozen in a smirk. The juxtapositioning of her standing over the second half of the image presented her as lording over the people. Also the message was incendiary, which could explain the vitriol. It should also be noted that in general the comments for all the memes do not mention personalities directly and in the three instances that were described above, they were in response to the memes posted by SGAG that specifically focused on Amy Khor, Khaw Boon Wan and the Prime Minister. In short, there is not much deviation into criticism of politicians, but instead people stay focused on the memes.

5.3.2.2.8 *Summary*

This section began with three questions:

1. Why is a comment posted?
2. What is being conveyed through the comment?
3. How is this conveyed?

⁴⁶ Housing Development Board.

The findings point to commentators posting their views as tokens of involvement in the humour. The various virtual forms of laughing-along and the use of emoticons are to demonstrate their participation and appreciation of the humour, to show their understanding of the memes, or it could simply be a show of solidarity and being identified as part of the group. Humour was shared, as when commentators added their own input to continue and prolong the joke, or to suggest alternative ways the funnies could be done. Some commentators like to make known their disagreement with SGAG's depiction. Some of these disagreements were due to incomprehension or misunderstanding of the humour due to a lack of contextual cultural capital on the viewer's part that prevented their access to the oppositional scripts necessary for seeing the incongruities. Others become too focused on the literal aspects of the memes and forget the need to suspend reality in order to make the humour work. The comments were mostly gentle and light-hearted in banter, as befits a joke-telling setting. Even when disagreements were voiced, they remained good-humoured. The harshest remarks were aimed at the targets of the jokes, namely the government. This creates an Othering effect, whereby all who agree with a viewpoint stands on the same side of the binary who take aim at a common enemy.

5.3.2.3 Process C – interaction among members

Honest and open interaction among members is a hallmark of the ideal Habermasian public as this ensures that even minority voices are heard. While the comments were analysed for how well the memes' possible intended messages reached the audience in Process A, and what the memes mean to them in Process B, in this section we analyse the comments for what the interaction among members mean as a whole to the online humour community. It answers how power is negotiated as the various members try to make their voices heard or accepted. It also shows the way members regard each other, which offers clues as to how the culture within the SGAG micro-community looks like.

5.3.2.3.1 Contest of behaviour

The interaction among members of the community in this case varied in dimension, ranging from friendly, passing mentions, to heated debate. Below is a conversation between various commentators and N. When a comment is directed at a specific person, the convention is to use the "@" sign to mean "directed at". In this conversation found in Meme 8, N made a comment that others did not

think was appropriate. Earlier segments of the conversation appear to have been deleted and the context of the conversation is not clear.

- N: Then why when someone die in accident sad?
30 January at 02:24 via mobile · Like

Other commentators, including the administrators of SGAG, took him to task. The first called N a “retard”, which is rude but SGAG was more polite.

- @N:how retarded can you be?
30 January at 02:27 · Like · 32
- SGAG Singapore : N please exercise some consideration. thanks.
30 January at 02:28 · Like · 23

Subsequent rebukes are softened the earlier “retard” remark by making a joke out of it.

- N just gone full retard.
Never go full retard, n.
30 January at 02:30 · Like · 7
- N..... Priesst..... Go fcuk yourself can?.... Sie sie. Thank You. Merci. Terima kasih. Arigatou. Syukran. Nandri.
30 January at 02:51 via mobile · Like · 2

N had the opportunity to defend his position, directing his rebuttal at B, but the conversation did not develop further. N never replied after the last comment.

- @B foreigners are awesome ok be more open minded
30 January at 18:31 via mobile · Like · 1
- I am not retarded u think I'm stupid I'm telling you no anyway who likes accidents.Singaporeans.
30 January at 18:33 via mobile · Like
- "N Then why when someone die in accident sad?" how is this related to having problems with having alot of people in SG? Please enlighten me.
30 January at 18:39 · Like

N would be labelled, in popular web idiom, as a troll, a “reference to online provocateurs who post inflammatory comments with the principal intent of provoking other users” (Santana, 2011). His remark about “someone die in accidents” did not have any obvious link to the population issue and the community took exception to it as “die” is still taboo. We see an open community, that is one without a gatekeeper, come together to take N to task. The owner of the site did not exercise its prerogative to

shut down N but instead gave a civil reminder to be “considerate”. Others were quick to regulate the conversation, by name calling. The choice of the word “retard” tellingly suggests that they did not regard N’s remark as sane or intelligent. The remark “please tell me that you don’t own the pink IC⁴⁷” once again demonstrate Othering at play. The implication is if N were a Singaporean he should be on “our” side, the true Singaporeans. His remark, which goes contrary to the dominant sentiment of not allowing more people into Singapore, shows that he is on the other side – the non-pink IC or immigrant group. The debate continued for 30 posts with the dissenters giving reasons why “foreigners” are good for the country, which were met with counter arguments that Singapore does not have the capacity for it. The debate did not have any positive direction and there was no indication of either party managing to convince the other of their position.

In another episode D made some comments and subsequently deleted the first, leaving the later comments to appear incongruent. This invited others to remark that the comment made no sense as it has “no head, no tail”. A “lol” followed the comment to soften the remark.

- Some people like the 'no head no tail' comment when they dun even noe what happened in the 1st place lol
30 January at 17:06 via mobile · Like

The admin issued a light-hearted rebuke that he should not have deleted the earlier comment, which would have prevented the misunderstanding:

- SGAG Singapore D that's because you deleted your comment still dare say.
30 January at 17:07 · Like · 20

D then defended his innocence by claiming that a computer bug was responsible for the deletion, and not him. He resigned himself to being misunderstood if the community chose not to believe him:

- Derrick Chew There was a bug, I didn't deleted it on purpose....
Can't say much if any of you chooses not to believe that there was anyway
30 January at 17:20 · Edited · Like

⁴⁷ All residents of Singapore are issued with identity cards (ICs). Singapore citizens hold pink ICs whilst permanent residents hold blue ones. Others domiciled in Singapore hold various classes of employment passes.

It is not clear if D indeed deleted (effectively withdrawing) an earlier remark, or if it really disappeared due to a technical glitch. As comments disappearing from Facebook on their own are not a common problem, it is likely that D was self-censoring his presumably provocative remark.

Regulation of behaviour can be effected by bullying and name calling, for example “dog” or “retard” in earlier instances. When M gave a long, protracted argument on the economics of the country, a commentator censured him for lecturing the community and called him a “chertarded”, which is a blended word of “teacher” and “retarded”. This is presumably a form of attempt at humour as well.

- @M this is no lecture bruddah. Don be extra chertarded
24 January at 20:38 · Like

Another blended name-calling is the combination of “fucking” and “ugly”, which is also an attempt to amuse.

- wow she is so furgly...
6 February at 22:47 · Like · 8

The following examples are more straightforward:

- ugly shit
6 February at 22:56 via mobile · Like · 2
- B*tch...
6 February at 23:08 via mobile · Like · 13

This commentator voiced a measured and rational objection to the “xenophobic” attitude of commentators. There was a hint of gloating when it was mentioned that the commentator managed to escape overseas and not have to suffer the negativity of fellow Singaporeans.

- Too bloody xenophobic. Good thing I've moved away to London – honestly, what is the direction Singapore is moving in? Sure, immigration is an issue. It's a global problem. But certainly looking down on people who arrive in Singapore to find honest work is not the way forward. And before anyone asks, no, I could care less for the PAP. I vote opposition, but still vehemently disagree with people who attack foreigners just for being foreign. I've been made to feel very welcome in London – and just as much we should make foreigners feel welcome at home.

Psychologists have long established name-calling as a technique to achieve compliance (Steele, 1975). However, is this sort of behaviour uncivil or just impolite? Papacharissi (2004) who defines politeness as “etiquette-related, and civility as respect for the collective traditions of democracy” argues that impoliteness does not necessarily impede the democratic conversation. Quite the contrary, over-observance of etiquette has a greater potential of hindering a civil discussion and in Papacharissi’s opinion name-calling, vulgarity, sarcasm and all caps “shouting” are all forms of impoliteness, not incivility (p.274, 279). At the same time polite messages can be uncivil and can be a greater threat. The data above were clearly impolite, but do not fit Papacharissi’s definition of incivility because the so-called trolls were never denied their right to speak their mind. Nevertheless, the conversation did not reach its public sphere potential as the discussion did not develop further due to the antagonist withdrawing from the altercation.

5.3.2.3.2 *Contest of knowledge*

There also exists a contest of knowledge among commentators. Individuals with specialised knowledge can be condescending and high-handed in putting down others, like these comments.

- Someone obviously hasn't attended a lesson in Economy here.

(Not so subtle hint - It's OP.)

24 January at 20:40 · Like

In the comment below, the commentator presented a strong argument but it was punctuated with several harsh and sarcastic remarks and the use of rhetorical questions underscored the tone.

However, while undoubtedly impolite, it is by the earlier definition civil, as it is a democratic presentation of a logical viewpoint.

- Well. Goes to show how strong our education system is. Taxes for us is income for the government. For benefits, Government need to spend more. If you earn less than usual can you spend more than usual? Logic please.
NEVER compare taxes rates because tax is determined for and by that country and economy. I am so sorry but the intelligence of some can insult humanity. Exchange rate has nothing to do with all this. And the difference is really just a few cents. 1 sgd

is 0.77 aussie dollar..if we compare to usd? 0.81. Please have substance before you speak @J

24 January at 20:30 via mobile · Like · 4

Here, again, is an example where an indirect swipe was made at the “many people here” rather than a discussion that is focused on the topic or issue. The rhetoric is quite powerful, with the use of a question and answer format as the opening.

- One of lowest tax in the world? Yes. One of highest cost of living in the world? Yes. I see many people here comparing the tax here to Australia, but have they even considered the salaries of the australians? You can earn so much more doing labour work. They make \$18 per hour at Macdonalds, \$5 per hour at Macdonalds in Singapore? I'm pretty sure every one would be glad to pay more tax given that they even have a much better salary in the first place.

24 January at 21:11 · Like · 1

This commentator continues with the use of the questioning technique to challenge an idea. The suggestion that is made that one has no right to put forth an argument unless one also has a plausible solution.

- HOW ? how to decrease ? one of my principle is that you don't bullshit unless you have a concrete workable solution.

24 January at 21:11 · Like

However, the potential for a robust debate falters when commentators do not put forth an argument to defend their position or explore the proposition but simply assert their stance:

- Easier said than done, and seriously our tax is super low -__-

24 January at 21:14 via mobile · Like · 4

- Ya tax is super low uhm maybe we should go Republican in the US and cut down on social welfare I guess

24 January at 21:18 · Like · 1

Another example of a commentator taking another to task is as follows. This commentator made the mistake of labelling India as “inhabitable”. (The context of the sentence suggests that the commentator probably made a typing error and had meant “uninhabitable”).

- Singapore will become inhabitable like India with 7 million people. MRT cannot contain so many people and people have to cling outside the train.

30 January at 11:05 · Like

The correction from an Indian national (that India was uninhabitable) was swift and sure:

- Inhabitable like INDIA?? I am sorry but India can sustain its population cos we have land! and untapped resources !
Inhabitable? sheesh!

31 January at 15:37 · Like

This retort was factual and forceful, and supports Papacharissi's argument that impolite arguments can still be civil and expand the knowledge for a democratic deliberation.

5.3.2.3.3 *Appearing educated*

Commentators took the opportunity to show off their knowledge in certain areas that may not be commonly known. This may be a form of contest within a social hierarchy that privileges the more educated who enjoy higher status and therefore a greater right to speak. This attitude is commonly credited to the first prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew who once said

If you can select a population and they're educated and they're properly brought up, then you don't have to use too much of the stick because they would already have been trained. It's like with dogs. You train it in a proper way from small. It will know that it's got to leave, go outside to pee and to defecate.

(Kwang, Fernandez, & Tan, 2015)

In this example, the commentator was demonstrating his knowledge of capitalism and how it is implemented in Singapore and appears to be an example of being knowledgeable and being educated conflated as the same thing. The "lol" can be interpreted as a condescending snort to indicate superior knowledge:

- lol @C. Such is the capitalism state of Singapore any screen must have commercials.
29 January at 18:28 · Like · 1

This commentator, responding to Meme 5, was eager to share the knowledge of the government's experiment with building underground for commercial and residential use. Presently, underground bunkers have been built for military purposes.

- Actually the govt/someone has been considering subterranean dwelling for a long time. But fire escape is a really problem.

29 January at 20:18 via mobile · Like · 1

The image of the subterranean housing also triggered association in this commentator with the “banding” system in Singapore’s education set-up where schools are rated according to their academic achievements.

- Banding just like our education system.

29 January at 19:43 · Like · 1

The “education system” is a recurring theme (see 5.3.2.2.2 Disagreement for example) and is a source of pride for those who benefitted from it and disdain for those who are marginalised due to the lack of access to it. (See Footnote 18).

Occasionally, a reasonable and sustained debate takes place. The instances this took place were in response to the memes that made some sort of counter proposal to government policies, albeit jokingly, for example Meme 2 (Figure 5.15), which was a three-panel comic strip depicting a board meeting.



Figure 5.15: Meme 2 Simple solution to problem.

A salvo was fired to challenge SGAG's suggestion:

- How can more benefit and less tax be in the same sentence ?

Math

24 January at 19:58 via mobile · Like

This was met by three very logical and deliberate responses:

- Well Singapore's population is slowly becoming more and more immigrants.... And less native Singaporeans.

As if the Singaporeans were all natives in the first place...

24 January at 20:02 · Like · 8

- the americans think they can do it. welfare + tax cuts.
and they now have a shitty economy.

24 January at 20:03 · Edited · Like · 16

- Exactly. Less taxes mean crappier economy. Don't complain about taxes. Look at Australian tax and GST, and look at their exchange rate.

24 January at 20:05 via mobile · Like · 4

The serious tone was interrupted by the next comment, which made an observation of the meme:

- the guy wearing the blue colour tshirt is always a victim

24 January at 20:11 · Like · 1

Although it was not marked with any “lol”, the context seems to suggest that the commentator found it amusing. The debate continued with several argumentative comments, interspersed with cheekier remarks like:

- Ain't the window fitted with Ballistic Glass?

24 January at 20:14 · Like

- endangered species:singaporeans

24 January at 20:15 via mobile · Like · 7

The effect is a serious argument with light-hearted remarks and banter interspersed among them. In total there were 33 more comments to the end of this thread after the “endangered species” remark, and the light-hearted ones were largely ignored while the more argumentative posts continued to gain momentum.

5.3.2.3.4 Summary

Power is negotiated by the various members as they try to make their voices heard or accepted. Responses to the memes are sometimes unconventional and these are called out by other members who perceive them as the work of trolls, and try to enforce some form of decorum. But in keeping the spirit of the humorous context, the rebukes were often framed in a light-hearted manner. Name calling was common. However, although they were rude, the overall evidence shows the conversation had remained largely civil. Arguments that offer facts were, on the other hand, a lot more forceful as members trying to push their points across, with liberal use of sarcasm and put downs, as the goal of winning the argument takes the commentators away from the humorous mood. Interspersed among the serious comments were upbeat remarks, but when no one responded to them they became fewer and fewer, while the serious conversations persisted until the end of the thread. Overall, Process C offers some clues as to what the culture of SGAG’s micro-community looks like; a culture where humour can be superseded by the competition to be right.

5.3.2.4 Process D – feedback to producer

Members of the community provided feedback to the producer in all the humour texts. SGAG co-founder Barry Schmelly confirmed that the SGAG team monitors the audience’s comments closely in part because they (SGAG) will be held liable for any remarks commentators make that may be seditious, libellous or criminal in intent and also for general feedback, which mostly comes in the form of suggestions for enhancement and improvement, couched in positive and friendly language. This good-natured atmosphere harmonises with the humorous environment of the site and illustrates social cohesion taking place; members of the community are sharing a collective experience of play.

- Get Steven Lim to sing it.

8 February at 02:06 · Like · 7

- I'm waiting for a video version played with the same background music, it'll be awesome, maybe by Mr Brown?

8 February at 10:51 · Like

- Don't forget make the flats even smaller.

29 January at 16:23 via mobile · Like · 6

- Fab idea! But tunnel not deep enuff wor....

29 January at 16:23 · Like · 1

- the top right conversation shld be in Chinese, Tagalog, Myanmar or Tamil..

21 January at 17:54 · Like

- How come no ideas bout bicycles? Sure enough there's a lot...

29 January at 22:30 via mobile · Like

- missing something.....the people spilling out of the hdb flats and the people spilling out from the sidewalk onto the road. and the rest of the cars w ppl on top?

30 January at 20:21 · Like · 7

Some of the suggestions, in response to humour texts like Meme 13 (men hanging on to the sides and top of a bus) were significant in the feedback loop in terms of the meme production.

- Triple decker bus maybe?

30 January at 20:25 via mobile · Like

- Soon somebody will come up with triple bendy

31 January at 16:08 via mobile · Like

The producers then took up the comments and produced Meme 15, which depicts a double-deck bendy bus and Meme 16, a 5-deck bus. (See also 5.3.2.2.1 Agreement).

5.3.2.4.1 Encouragement

Four of the top five popular memes (4, 9, 13, and 19) earned SGAG generous compliments from the members of the community for either their technique of image manipulation, or the ideas encoded.

This was completely absent in the fifth most popular Meme (24) and the five least popular memes.

The top four memes formed a series of images depicting how the trains and buses must be modified to

cope with an increased population. Apart from the many viewers who took the images literally and seriously (see 5.3.2.2.3 Incomprehension) those who understood the joke enjoyed the images and wanted to spur the producers to keep producing more images. The following are some of the more direct compliments for these four memes. Awesome idea!

- Lol, nice photoshop ;p
30 January at 20:20 · Like · 10
- You guys Photoshop getting better & better!
30 January at 20:21 · Like · 10
- das some good photoshop
2 February at 15:46 · Like · 1

There were also suggestions on how to improve the images:

- Why stop there? Put 4 rail tracks one on top of each other and make each station the height of a HDB block!
29 January at 16:25 · Like

SGAG responded and made subsequent changes to produce Meme 19, which earned them at least 14 compliments like the ones below:

- this is more realistic actually lol
- i like this... lol..
- thats my vision!
- Cool
- I seriously.. Don't mind.. It looks VERY COOL
- This one is realistic enough
- This one full of win!!
- Seems legit
- This looks friggin cool
- legendary design
- IKR! The editing is so perfect!
- That's a really impressive photoshop...

- good idea implement it asap ty
- wow it's so cool

However, this has to be viewed with reference to the actual number of comments. For Meme 19 the compliments make up only 13 % (14 out of 106) of the comments. Only 3% (or 4 out of 134) were praises for the Photoshop technique in Meme 13, 1% (2 of 168) for Meme 9 and 2.8% (4 of 145) for Meme 4. On the whole, commentators' chatter was mostly among themselves, and primarily consists of comments on the image and the ideas. Direct communications with SGAG are rare. However, the occasions that they do occur are important moments because SGAG and the viewers are each treating each other as real and present to each other, which makes those interactions no longer a form of mass media, as it is no longer focusing on the producer, following the top-down model. SGAG, instead is open to a bottom-up strategy, with timely creation of content that allows the community to contribute to the decision making, although admittedly there weren't many instances of bottom-up creations as audiences were more often than not passive consumers of the memes produced by SGAG and only contribute actively on occasions. When SGAG is not directly engaging with the audience, they are monitoring the conversations generated by the memes.

5.3.2.4.2 *Criticism*

The conversations among the members of the community were not always positive but they were generally constructive and were focused on how SGAG should do better, which means even the critics are appreciative of the memes and were not opposing their production. Rather they hold high expectations and standards for SGAG and their work. For example, there were instances when some were less than thrilled by the prolific output of images all on a single theme.

- one or two is funny.kept on repeat the same thing I think not funny ady leh
31 January at 18:08 · Like · 4
- okay... we get it. enough.
31 January at 18:44 · Like · 1
- jokes are not funny at all.
24 January at 22:52 via mobile · Like

- The number of 'jokes' about Singapore future population is too damn high
31 January at 16:12 · Like

The comments above would appear that SGAG had been called out for getting carried away with one particular idea, as a joke can only be retold so many times and remain funny. However, to say SGAG made a mistake may not be correct, as the negative responses like those above were still overshadowed by the many enthusiastic ones.

Criticisms also covered certain aspects of the coding in the image which were seen as inconsistent with expectations or reality.

- Road where got so few cars one
30 January at 20:24 via mobile · Like · 1

A similar response to Meme 5 on housing posed several technical questioned.

- why separate the elevator? if want to go from ground level to B2, need take one elevator, walk across the entire B1 floor, then take another elevator to B2
29 January at 17:52 · Like · 1

Again, with the multi-storey trains practical concerns were put forth.

- I dun think this will work. In the first place, can it enter the tunnel or not? And dun forget the high center of gravity will cause instability & toppling of the train.
29 January at 16:46 · Edited · Like · 12
- The tunnel need to dig bigger or else cant enter...
29 January at 16:21 · Edited · Like · 3
- It look dangerous...
29 January at 16:22 via mobile · Like · 2
- i thought is make the mrt longer?
29 January at 16:22 · Like · 3
- Fab idea! But tunnel not deep enuff wor....
29 January at 16:23 · Like · 1
- Looks like it will toh peng anytime x.x
29 January at 16:23 · Like · 1

This comment was highlighting a flaw in the idea rather than the image.

- Can achieve the same outcome by simply making the trains more frequent...

29 January at 16:23 · Like · 2

These literal interpretations of the multi-storey train prompted an exasperated and bemused response from the producers like the comment posted on 29 January at 17:33 (see 5.3.2.2.3 Incomprehension) and the one below.

- SGAG Singapore How come no one shout FAKE! This is obviously photoshopped!!!

29 January at 16:30 • Edited • Like • 18

A cheeky reply was posted by one member. This final riposte has the effect of which making the joke fall on those who didn't get the joke.

- Because we're slowly getting smarter.

29 January at 16:30 · Like · 11

Generally, Process D occurs indirectly, as SGAG monitors the comments for clues to the audience's demands. Compliments were generally brief whereas criticisms, although not prevalent, tend to be constructive and hold SGAG to certain standards. Repetition was frowned upon. Likewise, incongruity within the composition of the memes that were not part of the humour mechanism distracted the audience.

5.3.2.4.3 *Summary*

SGAG gains valuable knowledge about what their target audience like through monitoring the comments. The audience were quite free with their compliments and suggestions, although these sort of comments form only a minority of posts by viewers. On rare occasion, SGAG and the viewers treat each other as real and present to one another, which takes the interactions from a top-down to a bottom-up strategy for creating content that the community contributes to. On the whole, SGAG retains control over the agenda for what gets posted, but not the discussions in the comment section. Criticisms tend to be gentle and constructive, in the same spirit as the humour context. It also suggests the audience, even when critical, are on SGAG's side and are expressing their displeasure because they hold expectations of SGAG to adhere to certain standards of logic.

5.3.3 Consequences and Character

Establishing a cause-effect relationship between variables requires controlled experimental conditions. Impact, however, may be established by determining a correlation between variables. As cultural acts are socially constructed and not objective, this study does not make any claims of causality but data in this case study corroborate findings in existing literature (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Dahlberg, 2001; Gustafsson, 2012; Park, 2013; Parmelee & Bichard, 2011) that social media do contribute to debate, to question the legitimacy of political decisions, to the politicisation of people, and to the way public life is structured, to changes in social structure and much more.

While the analysis of the memes in this case study may not point to any direct visible effect, for example, in halting the White Paper⁴⁸, there was, however, an unprecedented rally with a convincing turnout⁴⁹ at Singapore's only government-sanctioned Speakers' Corner following this White Paper's release. Again, it cannot be determined how much the memes contributed to this rally but it is not unreasonable to argue that SGAG's memes fuelled some of that online outcry as well as the protest, which collectively forced the PAP government onto the back foot. Opposition leader Low Thia Khiang was referring to this recapitulation when he said to the press that "in the face of public pressure, (the PAP) then said that this is a worst-case scenario, even though they have actually planned for a 6.9 million population in their Population White Paper" (J. Y. Ng & Lee, 2015).

The present SGAG case study is clearly a continuation or rejuvenation of the earlier conversation started in the Chapter 4SMRT case study. However, in the time between these two media events, the conversation has been muted. Politicians on both sides of the divide tend to play safe and do not raise contentious issues or make provocative statements, and satirists may have no strong material to work with. In Barry Schmelly's opinion "a good government⁵⁰ is the greatest enemy of the satirist" (Barry Schmelly, 2016). Unless new insights are brought to the table, creating fresh memes that can sustain a conversation is difficult. Again, after the last post on 8 February, the political conversation has not

⁴⁸ The White Paper was subsequently passed without much difficulty.

⁴⁹ The organisers claimed 5000 people attended but wire agency AFP put the number between 1000-1500 (Goh & Mokhtar, 2013).

⁵⁰ It could be argued that the government appears "good" because it is usually successful in closing down information that might be unfavourable.

made much further progress as there was no actual impact noted; the game did not change.

Empirically, this was evident in the massive loss suffered by the Opposition during the 2015 General Election despite the heated rhetoric running up to it. In a post-election analysis, it was noted that despite social media's role as a hotbed for expressing dissatisfaction, "social media does not exist in a vacuum and users view it as part of the palette of information that can be relied on" (Z. L. Chong, 2015). Barry Schmelly attributes this to the lack of substance in the opposition candidates' campaigns, as they prefer to play the "emotional card" instead. He noted the lack of meme-worthy topics since the SMRT breakdown incident. This perhaps also underscores the limited impact social media have in effecting change alone. The White Paper was passed in Parliament with little trouble and nothing substantial came out of the online protests or the small gatherings at Hong Lim Park. The opportunity to reverse the liberal immigration policy through the general election was also missed, which made Costanza-Chock's (2013) point about the need for transmedia mobilisation for a social movement to be effective become germane:

Transmedia mobilization involves engaging the social base of a movement in participatory media making practices across multiple platforms. Rich media texts produced through participatory practices can be pushed into wider circulation to produce multimodal narratives that reach and involve diverse audiences, strengthening cultural, mobilization and policy outcomes (p. 97).

Soon (2015) noted that in the 2015 General Election the mainstream media remained highly relevant to voters. This lack of transmedia coverage meant the impact of the memes and the issues it highlights has a limited reach. However, the intensity of the 2015 general election online campaigning that led to the government fighting a rear-guard action seems to lend some (but only some) credence to Kemp and Blomkamp's (2013, pp. 244-245) argument that political humour can engage the public by "questioning claims" and "examining character" although their claim of "challenging power when misused" was not as evident. While change was not profound, the memes likely reflected and amplified the nascent political battle. At the very least, SGAG's series of memes have revived the

flagging conversation that began after the SMRT breakdowns in Chapter 4, and this in turn has renewed pressure on the government over its liberal immigration policy.

The concept of the media's "character", as Anderson (2012) terms it, in any particular context involves ascertaining the quality, and meaning the target audience attributes to it by assigning either a positive or a negative value to it. This would then answer the questions of how this study contributes to and enhances the quality of online interaction and cultural practices.

5.3.4 Conclusion

This chapter assumes that SGAG's comments, likes and shares are part of a functioning miniature public spheres and their frequency is indicative of the size and strength of the SGAG audience's feeling. This in turn is taken as a representative of a significant segment of Singapore's population. When an SGAG post received a high number of clicks through its social buttons, it was taken as a fair indication of the persuasiveness of the posts. The overall statistical properties of this media event suggest the life span of a meme is short, even though it may initially successfully provoke strong interest. MRT-related memes were found to have received more likes than other themes, which suggest that the overloaded transportation system has become a symbol of the angst felt by netizens. The image of Minister Khor, on the other hand, literally became the poster girl that represented the villains in this narrative upon whom ill feelings could be projected.

Using the comments function as heuristic cues, it was possible to determine that SGAG has an eye for spotting incongruities within the Singapore government's policies and had created memes to highlight them humorously in order to engage the audience on a logical level. There are indications that SGAG tried to contribute to the political discourse of Singapore in a reasonable manner but memes that appealed via reason drew less enthusiastic responses compared to those that tap into raw emotions, like fear and indignation: the literal depiction of crowded buses and trains in the memes taps into the audience's anxiety in real and tangible ways, whereas the least popular memes used more abstract images to obliquely suggest what the root causes of the Singapore's problems are. SGAG's success

can be attributed to them being an “insider” that understand the psyche of Singaporeans, compared to 9GAG, which attempted to produce memes that did not appeal to local audiences as they did not hit the sweet spot for virality. SGAG’s use of the “less is more” principle was a double edged sword that provided the audience leeway to fill in their own experiences when interpreting the memes, which led to an expansive online discussion, but at the same time, SGAG relinquishes considerable control over where the audience will take the conversation, as can be seen in the xenophobic rant that developed.

The analysis of Process A was less than satisfactory due to the lack of a more sensitive analytical tool and requires a remedy in the next stage of this thesis. In studying Process B, there are indications that commentators’ postings are tokens of their involvement in the humour making and enjoyment. They demonstrate appreciation of the humour, their understanding of the memes, or to show solidarity and be identified as part of the in-group. Some commentators did not hesitate to disagree when certain depictions were flawed in their execution. Incomprehension or misunderstanding of the humour was found to be due to a lack of contextual cultural capital on the viewer’s part. There were many instances when the literal aspects of the memes distracted the audience from the need to suspend reality in order for the humour to work.

The comments in this humour community were mostly gentle and light-hearted even when disagreeing. The unkindest remarks were aimed away at the targets of the jokes and not so much at each other when members of the community argued thereby creating an Othering effect. Nevertheless, negotiation of power was by no means absent and the various members make spirited attempts to be heard. Bullying, sometimes masquerading as humour, was used to impose certain behaviour, for example name calling. However, it was found possible that despite sometimes being rude, the conversation could remain civil. Factual arguments tend to be more forceful as members trying to win arguments departed from the humorous mood.

SGAG benefitted from monitoring the comments. Compliments and suggestions were common, but only on rare occasions do SGAG and their viewers address each other directly and a bottom-up process of content creation occurs; SGAG retains most of the control over the agenda setting.

Up to this point in the thesis, a meaningful picture of the mediascape has yet to be fully attained. This compass point will be most relevant at the end of the entire study, when a larger picture of this particular mediascape is obtained. To this end a study across the northern border over to Malaysia may help as the evaluation of the various facets may be helped by taking slightly different angles of the object of study. By juxtaposing the two same-yet-different countries (see 1.1 Malaysia and Singapore as joint sites for this study) to examine their use of political humour from different angles. This forms the rationale for the choice of the site in the next chapter.

6 Case Study three: PM Najib rhetoric and his *kangkung* gaffe

This chapter crosses the border into Singapore's neighbour, Malaysia where we find a similar phenomenon of those unimpressed by the Malaysian government's policies taking to Internet memes to lampoon. Recapitulating Chapter 1, despite the many differences between Singapore and Malaysia in terms of politics and culture⁵¹, the two also have much in common due to their shared history: Singapore was once part of Malaysia and they both have similar demographics, in terms of a multi-ethnic citizenry, and political systems that are, at the heart, not fully democratic. Malaysians, similar to Singaporeans, are denied free access to the media to offer contrary views to the dominant narrative propounded by the ruling regimes. Studying citizen satire in Malaysia, and setting it against the previous two case studies, offers a juxtaposed perspective of the two countries.

In this third case study the memes are viewed through the slightly different lens of what Davies (2007) calls an "interim protest". The Singapore examples hint strongly that while humour is actively present in social movements, it is not an obvious, direct tool of change but rather, a "decoration" on the "sword" rather than the sword itself (ibid). This chapter also explores digital political memes as a possible convergence of the political cartoon and the political joke, that is to say, it explores memes as a confluence of two different humour media forms. The present investigation is conducted through a more refined application of Anderson's media compass in order to map out selectively the relevant properties, processes, consequence and character of the chosen media event. The previous chapter demonstrated how the media compass can produce a deluge of information that can be overwhelming and unmanageable unless pared down to more convenient chunks. This chapter will focus only on how some citizens of these two countries circumvent restrictions on their expression of dissenting opinions, how the tradition of using visual political humour is inflected in digital media and how it impacts on the relationship between humour and political power. It specifically expands on the properties and processes compass points by drawing from the contiguous scholarship of political

⁵¹ While Malaysia and Singapore share cultural traditions, lifestyles, attitudes, values and even linguistic patterns have evolved since the two countries separated 50 years ago and it can be argued that today a Malaysian and Singaporean can be distinguished with relative ease by a person familiar with their vernacular practices.

cartoons in order to attain deeper insight into the communicative aspect in the first two case studies. In particular, this chapter zooms in on the visual properties of the memes to examine the various elements present within the meme and observes how they form a visual message. To determine Process A (see 5.3.2.1 production of image) the images are reverse-engineered to identify the creation process. The principles and techniques for creating the memes' message, can be identified and categorised to yield deeper insight into how they function by deconstructing the rhetorical devices. This rhetorical analysis is modelled after more established scholarship on political cartoons, especially Medhurst and DeSousa's (1981) *topoi* and Ryan's *apologia* and *kategoria*. The rationale for this adaptation will be discussed in a later section (see 6.2 Analytical tools).

The media event chosen for this case study is a series of memes responding to a speech on YouTube by the Malaysian Prime Minister. This series of memes, which shares some similarities with the case study in the Chapter 5, was significant as it gained national as well as international attention. Both the PM's speech and the memes have been reproduced by the foreign press, including the BBC. This media event had a clear beginning and end date which makes it a good example for tracking its life cycle. The memes were collected and curated by Facebook page, *Curi-curi Wang Malaysia*, who turned them into a series that formed what became a very public and humorous but farcical dialogue with the Prime Minister and the government. This provided a significant rhetorical aspect in terms of the democratic public discourse because, unlike other standard forms of rhetoric, playfulness was used to convey serious sentiments and political grievances.

6.1 Background information

On 12 January 2014 Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak commented that it was unfair for the public to blame the government for the increase in food prices and cited the price drop of *kangkung* – a variety of water spinach – to illustrate his government's effort to mitigate rising cost. His analogy drew a torrent of criticisms on social media (Pak, 2014a).

The country's sixth Prime Minister, Najib Razak is the eldest son of Malaysia's late second Prime Minister Abdul Razak (BBC, 2016b). PM Najib's predecessor, Abdullah Badawi had led the Barisan

Nasional coalition to its worst general election in the 50 years it had been in power and Najib was chosen by his party to replace the ineffectual Abdullah. Najib's tenure began promisingly, with some significant shifts in policies, for example, allowing some suspended newspapers to resume publication, relaxing a law prohibiting students from joining political parties, and making cuts to government subsidies. However, his hold on to power became increasingly challenged due to past unresolved scandals that implicated him catching up with him. These scandals include the sensational murder case of Altantuya Shaariibuu, a Mongolian woman linked to a government defence deal with France that took place when Najib was Defence Minister (Aljazeera, 2015), as well as the 1MDB financial scandal that had been widely reported across the world (BBC, 2016a; Middleton, 2016; WSJ, 2016). These threats to his leadership forced Najib to counter the assaults with a dramatic reversal in policies as well as a shift in priority as he began to apply the Sedition Act to silence critics (Malaysian Insider, 2014) (see also Chapter 7 Case Study four: Teresa Kok). The situation has since escalated to the sacking of the Attorney-General and some cabinet colleagues who became too critical of him (CNA, 2015; Pooi & Ramasamy, 2016). The government also threatened to curb social media use with new laws in retaliation for being demonised online (Kumar, 2015; T. G. Yap, 2015).

The case study of this chapter is chronologically situated at a much earlier point along this sequence of events before Najib applied the full force of the law at his disposal. Nevertheless, it bears remembering that political environment was still highly constrained during this period, and for netizens to risk incurring the wrath of those in power to create memes ridiculing the Prime Minister and circulating them on social media in a fashion similar to the Singapore cases⁵² is remarkable (Roslani, 2014; idzerqy, 2014; Palatino, 2014b). The memes in this case have notable characteristics: they are spontaneous creations, usually done using crude Photoshopping techniques, by a group of dispersed and unconnected amateurs to express strong opinions about socio-political issues. These characteristics are very similar to the examples from the SMRT case study in Chapter 4. I make the same argument for Malaysian context as Sreekumar and Vadrevu (2013) had argued for the Singapore context. Visual online static memes convey messages to the ruling party and criticise the status quo.

⁵² This similarity is another example of the basis that makes an association between the two countries tenable.

Prime Minister Najib does not take criticism well but through memes some citizens have found a way to make their distaste for his conduct indirectly known to him and this communication strategy is important for scholarly study.

The use of static images to comment or critique on socio-political issues has been widely studied. In Chapter 2 it was mentioned that Marsot (1971) documented the use of political bas-relief carvings on ancient Egyptian relics. Visual political commentaries in the form of caricatures and cartoons flourished with the establishment of newspapers in the 18th century (Halloran, 2013; Long, 1962; Streicher, 1965). The Internet has enabled the practice to take on a digital form, raising questions about how the tradition is inflected in digital media and how it impacts on the relationship between humour and political power.

Coupled with the development of online social media, which reach “hundreds of millions of users” (Ratkiewicz et al., 2010, p. 297), memes have generated a variety of research efforts. However, they tend to focus on the computer-mediated aspect, the implication of its proliferation, the socio-political dynamics created, and the trends and topics that emerge in their wake (Colbaugh & Glass, 2011). Examples include: understanding how memes go viral (Guadagno, et al., 2013); how they help predict news cycles (Leskovec, et al., 2009); and how the profusion of memes results in intense competition for social media users’ very limited attention (Weng, et al., 2012). The focus of current research on the reproduction of memes as textual objects being reappropriated across networks has little to say about the intentions of those who produce memes. This was exemplified by the limitation that was encountered in the SGAG case study, when Process A was analysed (see Section 5.2.3.1 Process A – production of image).

To fill this gap in knowledge this chapter investigates the way visual memes are produced and used by certain segments of the public who want to disrupt dominant occupiers of public space.

6.2 Analytical tools

Prior to the emergence of political memes, it is likely that the most prevalent use of political images was the political cartoon, which has been extensively studied historiographically and sociologically

(Alba, 1967; William A Coupe, 1967; Streicher, 1965), as visual data (Emmison & Smith, 2000), and as an artefact of society (Giarelli & Tulman, 2003). Political cartoons are viewed as powerful mirrors of culture and society (Brabant & Mooney, 1986; Brabant & Mooney, 1999; Chavez, 1985; Dines, 1995; Kasen, 1980; Koelble & Robins, 2007). Cartoon scholars borrowed heavily from linguistics, for example Morris' (1993) analysis of condensation, or Barthes' (1977 [1964]) theory of text-image relations, and the result was the emergence of a perspective that has become dominant among cartoon scholars: political cartoons are a form of metaphor. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981) offered a novel argument that the political cartoon, as a visual form of persuasive communication, utilises rhetorical devices similar to oral rhetoric. Cahn (1984) made further enquiries along this line and concluded that cartoons rely on universal visual properties, while Bostdorff (1987) proposed the use of Burkean theory of rhetoric (Burke, 1969b) to understand the rhetoric itself.

Although political memes and political cartoons have distinct differences – memes are created by a dispersed number of amateurs through the manipulation of images and texts using software, whereas political cartoons are discrete, independent units produced by a few professional artists – they also share an important similarity: both are persuasive forms of visual communications on socio-political issues. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981) argued that:

the cartoonist discovers or invents content, arrange [*sic*] that content for special effect, and stylize the presentation by conscious application of the artistic principles inherent to the medium. Memory and delivery are also important for the cartoonist though in a manner and mode which depart somewhat from the oral tradition (p. 199).

Using this same argument this chapter endeavours to demonstrate through the Malaysian examples that the visual rhetorical principles found in political cartoons can similarly be found in humorous political memes and that the tools of analysis for visual rhetoric can cross over to the digital domain to yield insights into the intentions of meme creators and produce a deeper understanding of the public debate.

A basic tool for understanding the logic behind each meme is Aristotle's syllogism model often represented thus:

Major premise: All animals are mortal

Minor premise: All men are animals

Conclusion: All men are mortal

(Guthrie, 1990, p. 161)

Medhurst and DeSousa noted in cartoons the frequent use of *Enthymemes* – the omission of at least one of the premises (first- and second-order *Enthymemes*) or the conclusion (third order *Enthymemes*) – invites “the reader to respond in accord with certain values, beliefs, and predispositions” (Medhurst & DeSousa, 1981, p. 204). In other words, the audience is subtly guided to fill in the blanks in a predetermined manner. *Enthymemes* engage the audience more effectively and are similarly employed liberally in memes as well, as this chapter demonstrates. The classical concept of *bathos* (Greek for “depth”), the “unintentional descent in literature when, straining to be pathetic or passionate or elevated, the writer overshoots the mark and drops into the trivial or the ridiculous” (Abrams, 1981, p. 13), forms a helpful framework to evaluate the Malaysian Prime Minister’s faux pas and the meme creators’ responses. Similar to political cartoonists, meme creators also draw from a common set of *topoi*: political commonplaces, i.e. topics available to the graphic rhetor; literary/cultural allusions, such as legend, literature, electronic media and other identifiable fiction; personal character traits of the target as commonly perceived and shared by the public; and finally, idiosyncratic and transient themes, i.e. issues that are clear to the contemporary audience (Medhurst & DeSousa, 1981, pp. 200-205).

Contrast is a major form of disposition graphic rhetors use to challenge audiences to evaluate how new ideas compare with the old, or the good versus bad, and other opposing elements within the memes. Meme creators use the minor disposition form of *commentary* in some of the memes to manipulate public opinion by offering their version of “truth” without the inconvenience of explaining how this truth is arrived at. *Contradiction* creates stark dichotomies and polarities that leave the viewers no choice but to arrive at a singular response: condemnation (ibid, pp. 205-207). This is unlike *contrast*, which offers a choice of images to the viewer to consider and compare.

Classical *stases* described by Hermagoras of Temnos can be used to evaluate the issues within the larger context of the rhetorical debate for their *coniectura* (factualness), *definitiva* (definition and scope), *generalis* or *qualitas* (quality and impact of the issue) and *translatio* (the jurisdiction) (Kennedy, 1994, pp. 98-99). They are useful for identifying how these elements within the Prime Minister's speech are challenged by the memes. Distinguishing between *kategoria* (speeches of accusation) and *apologia* (speeches of defence) (Ryan, 1982, p. 255) provides insight into the motivations and purposes of the visual rhetor and is especially valuable in establishing the relationship between the many disparate memes responding to the Prime Minister's speech in this chapter, as it shows the interconnectedness of the discrete memes and how they function as a collective rhetorical voice. Deeper analysis of *kategoria* lends clarity to what exactly is being attacked – the target's *policy* or *character* – as this shows which is important to the meme creators (Ryan, 1982, p. 255).

6.3 Kangkung Analysis

The *kangkung* controversy began with a speech by Prime Minister Najib that was uploaded to YouTube on 12 January 2014 (AnakSungaiDerhaka, 2014). He was responding to growing discontent over the price increase for many basic commodities that has resulted in at least one major public protest in the nation's capital on New Year's Eve (S. Lim, 2014; Netto, 2014). In his speech, he cited the price drop of *kangkung* as evidence of his government's effectiveness.

A number of irate members of the public responded immediately and spontaneously by going online to lampoon the Prime Minister for being out of touch with ordinary folk. Water spinach is a cheap vegetable that grows easily in ditches, and its price hike is the least of their worries, amid significant increases in oil prices, electricity tariffs, and road tolls, amongst other things. Image-macros of the Prime Minister and/or *kangkungs* flooded the Malaysian cyberspace, and gained sufficient traction to attract even the interest of the international media (Pak, 2014a). The resulting embarrassment for the prime minister was sufficient for him to respond publicly; a clear indication of the political power of the memes to provoke a response.

Sample memes for this study were extracted from *Curi-curi Wang Malaysia* (CCWM), a Facebook page with the following stated purpose:

...originally was created with the purpose to voice out against Malaysia's Tourism Ministry which spent RM1,758,432 for a simple facebook [sic] fan page with 6-simple apps (that cost RM293,072 each) ("*Curi-curi Wang Malaysia*," 2011).

The choice of Facebook is strategic as it is an important social medium in Malaysia (see 2.3.3.1. Facebook). Statistics in 2013 reveal that more than 13 million people (45.5 per cent of the entire population) in the country used Facebook at the time of the controversy. Malaysia was the 8th largest Facebook user in Asia and 21st in the world" (Mahadi, 2013). At the time of writing CCWM continues to enjoy a significant following, with 212,000 likes, and is a key Facebook page that uses humour to critique the government. The page was first started to specifically mock Tourism Minister Dr Ng Yen Yen's spending of RM1.8 million to set up six Facebook pages to promote Malaysia as a tourist destination. Within 18 hours of it being set up, *Curi-curi Wang Malaysia* (literally "stealing money in Malaysia", a play on the ministry's slogan *Cuti-cuti Malaysia* – "holiday in Malaysia") garnered 11,380 likes, which is half the number of likes on the Tourism Malaysia's overpriced Facebook page (Palani, 2011).

CCWM was chosen as a convenient and representative curator of the more popular visual memes circulated online. A total of 20 memes and posts (coded C1 to C20) were published over the five days following the release of Najib's video. Table 6.1 lists the memes chronologically. Analysis of the posts in the next section will follow this order.

Interest in *kangkung* was intense during the first two days and, as was also observed in the previous chapter, quickly tapered off by the third (Figure 6.1). Other news completely replaced the *kangkung* thread by the sixth day

Date	Code	Entry	Likes	Shares	Remarks
13 Jan	C1	Najib's video	NA*	NA*	Posting on
14					Najib's

					video: no meme
	C2	Keep Calm and Eat <i>Kangkung</i>	276	760	
	C3	<i>Perkangkung</i>	31	96	
	C4	The price of 'KANGKUNG' has been LOWERED...	206	132	
	C5	Twitterjaya abuzz over PM's 'kangkung' remark	NA*	NA*	News update, no meme
	C6	UMNO/BN's success must be a MODEL for ALL nations to revere and follow!	17	32	
14 Jan 14	C7	Defend kalimah ' <i>Kangkung</i> '	30	77	
	C8	Special Promo! The world's FIRST...'HEALTHY Cigarettes'!	80	130	
	C9	KFB	NA*	NA*	
	C10	King Kang Kong	71	177	
	C11	<i>McKangkung</i>	72	261	
	C12	<i>Kangkung</i> marriage proposal	29	97	
	C13	Brains of MACAIS!	122	84	
	C14	<i>Kangkung</i> toll	100	184	
15 Jan 14	C15	<i>Kangkung</i> Breakfast lunch dinner	256	24	
	C16	The MEGA PROJECT	44	21	
	C17	Puisi Kangkong – Ungku Aziz	70	26	
16 Jan 14	C18	BN supporters on the DEFENSIVE	NA*	NA*	
17 Jan 14	C19	Najib replies	NA*	NA*	
	C20	One does not simply raise the price of <i>kangkung</i>	NA*	NA*	

* Data not retrievable due to changes made to the posts by page owners

Table 6.1: List of posts on *Curi-curi Wang Malaysia* from 13/01 to 15/01 ("*Curi-curi Wang Malaysia*," 2011).

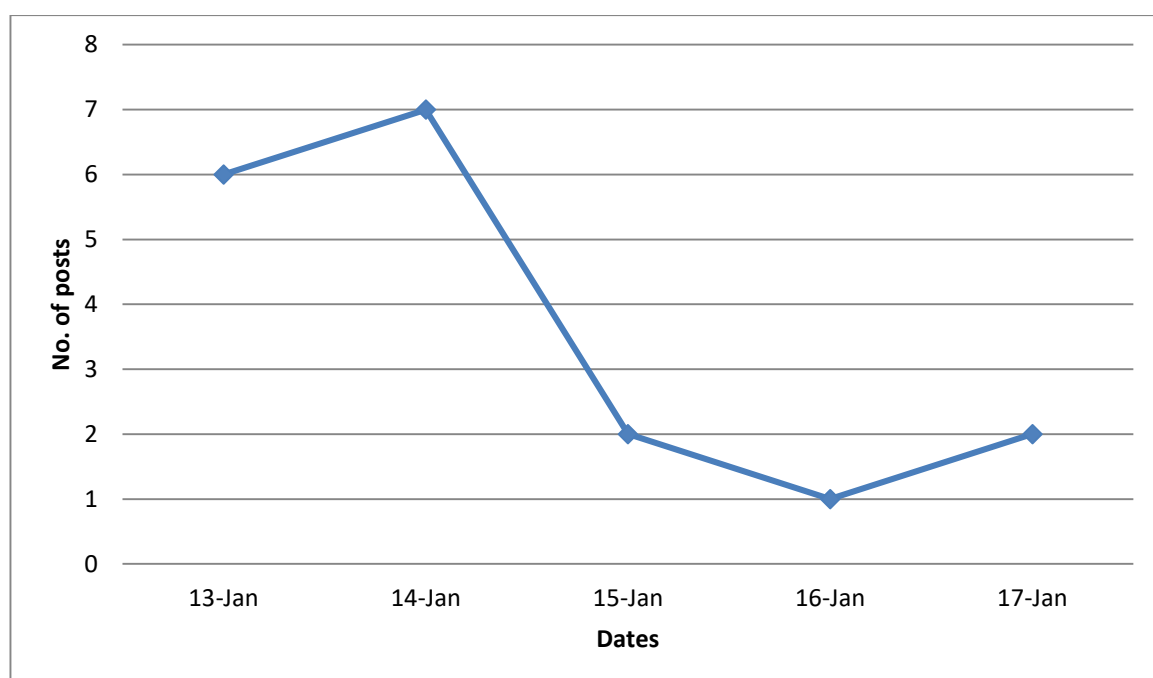


Figure 6.1: Chart showing number of posts over a five-day period.

6.3.1 Analysis of posts on 13 January 2014 (C1-C6)

Unlike formal forensic discourse⁵³ with its clear attacks and responses, this present discourse is part of an ongoing exchange. Pinning down the exact starting point is problematic but I argue that Najib's speech (AnakSungaiDerhaka, 2014) can be taken as the starting point of this particular thread involving *kangkung* as it was the first mention of the vegetable, even though in the larger context his speech is part of an ongoing rhetorical exchange about rising costs and the government's role in mitigating them. Table 6.2 is the transcript and translation of his speech:

Code	Transcript	Translation
T1	<i>Kalau harga sayur-sayuran naik</i>	If prices of vegetables go up

⁵³ Forensic (judicial) discourse is one of Aristotle's (350b BCE) three branches of rhetoric examining the justice of a charge or accusation, with the other two being deliberative (with the aim to persuade or dissuade) and epideictic (ceremonial, with the aim to commemorate or blame). See Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*, <http://www.bocc.ubi.pt/pag/Aristotle-rhetoric.pdf>

T2	<i>Sawi naik, kangkung naik</i>	Mustard greens go up, water spinach goes up
T3	<i>Ada masa dia naik, ada masa dia turun.</i>	Sometimes they go up, sometimes they go down
T4	<i>Hari ini dalam suratkhbar saya baca ada yang dah turun</i>	Today, I read in the newspaper that some have gone down
T5	<i>Kangkung dulu naik, sekarang ni dah turun</i>	Water spinach prices was up, now it has gone down
T6	<i>Bila turun kenapa tak puji kerajaan?</i>	When it goes down, why is there no praise for the government?
T7	<i>Masa naik dipersalahkan kerajaan.</i>	But when they go up the government is blamed
T8	<i>Ini tidak adil.</i>	This is not fair

Table 6.2: Transcript and translation of PM Najib's speech Source: (AnakSungaiDerhaka, 2014).

Najib's speech shows clear evidence of formal rhetorical principles. In T1-T2 of Table 6.2, the Prime Minister presented as his main premise a hypothetical situation of two vegetables' prices going up. He observed that they sometimes go down as well (T2). Drawing from the stasis *coniectura* he cited the fact reported by the newspaper that there has been a drop in water spinach prices (T4 & T5). The heart of the *kangkung* controversy is his rhetorical question "[w]hen it goes down, why is there no praise for the government? But when they [*sic*] go up the government is blamed?" (T6 & T7). This question forms the minor premise in his syllogism. One possibility is that Najib was attempting to downplay the *qualitas* of the price movement. He may also be raising the question of *translatio* as he sought to deflect blame to market forces rather than on what his government could or should have done. His motive for saying "this is not fair" (T8) is strong evidence of a *kategoria* accusation if it were taken literally. Given that protests against price hikes had been held several weeks earlier Najib is probably levelling this accusation (that it is not fair) at his critics. Trying to appeal for fairness is an attempt to address the *definitiva*. The Prime Minister is either trying to win over his critics or appealing to a neutral or sympathetic segment of the audience. Viewed from a pragmatic angle, when someone complains of something not being fair, it can also be interpreted as an *apologia*, in defence against unmerited criticisms.

It cannot be concluded simply that the Prime Minister’s speech is either a *kategoria* or an *apologia*; it is more likely to be a combination of both. Whichever way this is taken, the charge and conclusion stated here is that “this is not fair” is a criticism of his *policy* rather than *character*.

Utilising the Aristotelian model, the speech can be summarised thus:

1. Main premise: The government is responsible for keeping food prices stable (unstated).
2. Minor premise: *Kangkung* price has dropped (stated).
3. Conclusion: Therefore, the government is responsible and deserves credit (stated).

The enthymeme is of the first order.

6.3.1.1 C1

The first response (C1) on CCWM was an announcement alerting page members to the Prime Minister’s video, which had gone viral:

Code	Text
R1	And what's quickly becoming a TREND & VIRAL right now?
R2	When Malaysia's STUPID PM of the 47 per cent is proud of the BN Government's ACHIEVEMENT of LOWERING the prices of...
R3	...KANGKUNG = 'Spinach'!
R4	Wow! We must have a LOT of PROFESSOR 'KANGKUNG' working and ADVISING our Government in BN [Barisan Nasional].

Table 6.3: CCWM’s response initial response to Najib’s speech (Posted 13 January 2014, “*Curi-curi Wang Malaysia*,” 2011).

There are elements of formal rhetoric in this post too. R1 of Table 6.3 begins with a rhetorical question drawing attention to the speech while at the same time establishing *coniectura*, that this is a fact. R2 is a strong *kategoria* attacking the Prime Minister’s character (“STUPID PM”) as well as his lack of credibility as a leader (47 per cent is the popular vote his party actually won in the last election). The *definitiva* of “achievement” is questioned since it is tied to the “LOWERING the prices of...” (R2) and “...KANGKUNG = 'Spinach'!” (R3). The use of ellipses denotes a dramatic pause suggesting a metaphoric drumroll or a “wait for it! wait for it!” *bathos* or anti-climax. The *qualitas* is indicated in the emotionally charged words “proud” and “stupid”. Interestingly, the Prime Minister, apart from being labelled as “stupid”, was not held solely accountable for his policy. The blame has been apportioned indirectly to his “47 per cent” supporters and the “PROFESSOR 'KANGKUNG'”

working and ADVISING our Government in BN” (R4). This again is an oblique dismissal of the Prime Minister as lacking even the capacity to come up with an original idea and that this argument, as outrageous as it was to use *kangkung* as a symbolic reference, could not have originated from him but from his advisors. Arguably, this is a *translatio* stasis as it is establishing the jurisdiction of this *kangkung* idea that has been perceived to be thoughtless. Notably, *kangkung* in R4 was also turned into an adjective modifying “professors”, in line with the notion of stupidity.

6.3.1.2 C2

The first meme (Figure 6.2) responding to the Prime Minister’s speech (Table 6.2) was an adaptation of the “Keep Calm and Carry On” World War 2 poster (Figure 6.3), a cultural allusion *topos*. In this meme, the green lettering contrasted with the original red and the crown has been replaced by a stalk of *kangkung*. Matheson (2005), citing Barthes (1977 [1964]), argues that the meaning of a text is derived intertextually because every text is a “multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (p. 146). Experts in various fields have offered their opinions about the original 1939 poster:

Alain Samson, a social psychologist at the London School of Economics, says that in times of difficulty, "people are brought together by looking for common values or purposes, symbolised by the crown and the message of resilience. The words are also particularly positive, reassuring, in a period of uncertainty, anxiety, even perhaps of cynicism". Dr Lesley Prince, who lectures in social psychology at Birmingham University, is blunter still. "It is a quiet, calm, authoritative, no-bullshit voice of reason," he says. "It's not about British stiff upper lip, really. The point is that people have been sold a lie since the 1970s. They were promised the earth and now they're worried about everything - their jobs, their homes, their bank, their money, their pension. This is saying, look, somebody out there knows what's going on, and it'll be all right" (Henley, 2009).

The choice of this World War 2 poster is unlikely to be arbitrary. Figure 6.2 contrasts with Figure 6.3 not just in design but in the possible intended meanings, which includes the insensitivity of the Malaysian Prime Minister to the hardship of the people in the face of inflation. Samson’s point that the original poster was not really about putting on a stiff upper lip notwithstanding, given the stereotype that has since emerged that sees the British population predisposition to putting on a “stiff

upper lip” and carrying on, Najib’s exhortation could be interpreted as appealing to Malaysians to carry on and eat *kangkung* with the same fortitude and resilience, and to ignore the hardship they are facing, parallel to the “*Qu'ils mangent de la brioche*” (“Let them eat cake”) commonly and likely erroneously attributed to French queen Marie Antoinette.

It is significant that the very first response to Najib’s speech falls outside of any neat *kategoria* or *apologia* dichotomy, suggesting a reluctance to participate in a reasoned argument with him, as the meme did not aim directly at him but is mocking him in front of others instead. There is a strong hint of disdain and contempt towards Najib’s invitation to engage with his audience, suggesting that his attempt is not even worth a proper reply, merely playful mockery. Najib’s invitation is probably read as insincere, condescending and not really open to all as people have no real opportunity to make him listen to their perspectives.



Figure 6.2: “Keep Calm and Eat *Kangkung*” (C2), posted 13 January 2014 (“*Curi-curi Wang Malaysia*,” 2011).



Figure 6.3: Original 1939 Keep Calm and Carry on poster.
 (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keep_Calm_and_Carry_On#mediaviewer/File:Keep-calm-and-carry-on-scan.jpg)

6.3.1.3 C3

C3 (Figure 6.4) on the other hand is a construction of greater complexity and draws from an unrelated political issue (categorically an idiosyncratic and transient *topos*) as a counter-*kategoria* on the Prime Minister's policies. This meme depicts members of the far-right group Perkasa with former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad declaring their supremacy while wearing head dresses decorated with plumes of *kangkung*. The leader, Ibrahim Ali is brandishing a bunch of *kangkung* menacingly. It is not clear why Dr Mahathir's *kangkung* is in a shade of purple rather than green like the others. The use of a photo Dr Mahathir and Perkasa raises *translatio* and *coniectura* questions of its own, as the group had never actually made any reference to *kangkung* at all. It also highlights and contrasts the racial bias of the "1Malaysia" national unity programme promoted by the Prime Minister. This places C3 under the personal character traits *topos*. Viewing this against the Prime Minister's speech, by invoking Perkasa the meme appears to challenge Najib's *definitiva* statement of what is fair by asking, is what Perkasa doing fair?



Figure 6.4: “Perkangkung” (C3) posted 13 January 2014 (“Curi-curi Wang Malaysia,” 2011).

The addition of a prefix *per* to the noun *kangkung* in the Malay language has the same function as the addition of the suffix “-tion” in English to mean an action resulting from the noun. The phrase “*Jangan cabar kami*” (Do not provoke/challenge us) was a common war cry of this non-governmental organisation to defend the special place of Malay ethnic privilege and rights, and of Islam within Malaysia. This war cry has been adapted in the meme to include the word *kangkung* to read “do not challenge our *kangkung*”. The word *kangkung* appears to be evolving and appropriating a new meaning: stupidity. The suggestion, a third-order enthymeme, can be represented as follows:

1. Main premise: The *kangkung* statement is stupid (implied through context)
2. Minor premise: Fundamental Malay right-wingers support *kangkung* (stated)
3. Conclusion: Therefore, they (the right-wingers) are stupid (omitted)

6.3.1.4 C4

C4 (Figure 6.5) uses multiple frames to tell a story. The first frame shows Najib declaring the drop in price of *kangkung*. Frame 2 shows his sycophantic followers cheering in jubilation at the news. The

following three frames portray ordinary citizens using *kangkung* to pay for fuel, road toll and public transport and the final frame has a close up of a member of the UMNO women's wing praising Allah with a bunch of *kangkung* stuffed into her mouth. The use of multiple frames gives C4 a more formal rhetorical construction as a narrative is built up through the sequence of frames. This multi-frame meme is analogous to the cartoon strip in 20th century newspaper cartoons, as opposed to the editorial cartoon (a single-frame with a political commentary) or the pocket cartoon (a similarly single framed illustration used primarily as a space filler and for pure entertainment purposes but without a political message) (Lewis, 2012). Contradiction, defined by Medhurst and DeSousa (1981, p. 207) as the revelling in "the exposition of dichotomies and the unmasking of polarities" that "invites not attention but condemnation", is achieved by juxtaposing a frame of the Prime Minister saying "[h]arga *kangkung* dah turun! Pujilah kerajaan!" ("Price of *kangkung* has fallen! Praise the government!") with that of an image of an enthusiastic and jubilant member of the women's wing UMNO, the Prime Minister's party. The caption "Yeay! Kerajaan baik! Selesai segala maasalah!!" ("Yay! Good government! All our problems solved!!") builds a narrative that is followed by the ridiculous images of refuelling a car with *kangkung*, paying for road toll with *kangkung*, and gaining entry to the light rail transport system with *kangkung*. This expansion of the *kangkung* issue to other pressing political topics challenges the *translatio* in the Prime Minister's speech, as it holds the government responsible not just for the price of *kangkung* but also the other essential goods. At the same time, it expands the *qualitas* or impact of the price fluctuations to other issues. The final frame depicts a weepy UMNO woman praising God but with a bunch of *kangkung* photoshopped into her hands, turning it into a symbolic offering. The producer of this meme has included his or her initial as MG.



Figure 6.5: “The price of ‘KANGKUNG’ has been LOWERED...” (C4) posted 13 January 2014 (“Curi-curi Wang Malaysia,” 2011).

This *kategoria* attacks the character of those supportive of the Prime Minister as foolish and suggests the rationale that the supporters must have adopted to have bought into Najib’s argument. There is no evidence that this is indeed the line of argument that the supporters take, and is likely to be what Bormann, cited in Benoit et al. (2010), calls a rhetorical fantasy theme, that is the dramatization of a discussion that draws in the participation of viewers, reproduced in “fantasy chains” to increase cohesiveness among members.

Comparing the enthymeme of the Prime Minister’s original message...

Main premise: The government is responsible for keeping food prices stable (unstated).

Minor premise: *Kangkung* price has dropped (stated).

Conclusion: Therefore, the government is responsible and deserves credit (stated).

...it is noticeable that his logic has been developed in the rhetorical engagement and pushed further beyond to ridiculous conclusions about the political commonplace of rising costs:

With lower *kangkung* prices we can now use *kangkung* to fuel our cars.

With lower *kangkung* prices we can now use *kangkung* to pay for road tolls.

With lower *kangkung* prices we can now use *kangkung* to pay for the use of the subway.

The choice of using the women's wing reveals a gender bias, suggesting that Najib's supporters who blindly praise him are primarily women — a sign of low level of respect for women's intelligence — capable only of giving an emotional, non-rational response to the PM. The implication is that rational people see through him.

6.3.1.5 C5

C5 is a short news post with a tiny screenshot of another Facebook page, Milo Suam. The meme depicts the Prime Minister giving a speech with an upraised fist, into which a stalk of *kangkung* has been digitally added. A speech bubble has him saying “*Kangkung ini bukti saya faham kesusahan rakyat*” (“This *kangkung* is proof that I understand the people's difficulties”).



Figure 6.6: Small screenshot of a meme from another Facebook page, Milo Suam.

The text of the post is a short excerpt from news portal MalaysiaKini, which served to inform members that “Twitterjaya” (the term used to represent the cyber public space in Malaysia) is now reacting actively to the *kangkung* remark.⁵⁴ The meme is presumably simply to make known to CCWM's readers that the story had gone viral and was not meant to be funny in itself. MiloSuam, from which the screenshot was taken, is a blog⁵⁵ with a self-explanatory tagline that says “*menghasut*

⁵⁴ “Twitter” is a direct reference to the social medium and the suffix “-jaya” is common in the naming convention of official places, for e.g. Putrajaya, the administrative capital of the country, or Cyberjaya, the science park town forming a part of Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor.

⁵⁵ See <http://milosuam.blogspot.co.nz/>

dengan fakta” (“to instigate with facts”). At the time of writing, it has 342,657, which is a bigger following than CCWM’s.

Twitterjaya abuzz over PM's '*kangkung*' remark beta.malaysiakini.com

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's use of the humble water spinach, or *kangkung*, to explain why the government shouldn't be blamed for the volatility of food prices has drawn widespread ridicule on....

("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

6.3.1.6 C6

C6 in Figure 6.7 builds upon C5, possibly a direct response to or a reinterpretation of it, and is a commentary because it offers a version of truth without justification. Using the same image, the text has been modified into a *kategoria* that targets the Prime Minister’s “*program transformasi*” (“transformation programme”) for turning Malaysia into a developed nation by the year 2020 (Pemandu, 2011). The slogan 1Malaysia has been replaced by 111*Kangkung* with the flags of the Prime Minister’s party, UMNO, on the first digit, the Malaysian flag in the second and the symbol for the ruling coalition, *Barisan Nasional*, as the third. It is unclear why there are three “1s”. The accompanying text, “UMNO/BN's success must be a MODEL for ALL nations to revere and follow!” is a sarcastic jibe at the unsophisticated reasoning behind the *kangkung* remark. It thereby questions the *qualitas* stasis of the government, and by extension, Najib’s ability to bring about the promised transformation. The logic behind this meme is a third-order enthymeme:

Main premise: Najib introduces 1Malaysia to transform Malaysia into a developed nation (depicted in the 1Malaysia logo)

Minor premise: Najib brought down *kangkung* prices (implied by stalk of *kangkung topos*)

Conclusion: *Kangkung* is part of the plan to bring Malaysia into developed nation status (omitted).



Figure 6.7: "UMNO/BN's success must be a MODEL for ALL nations to revere and follow!" (C6) posted 13 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

6.3.2 Analysis of posts on 14 January 2014 (C7-C14)

6.3.2.1 C7

C7 (Figure 6.8), similar to C3, highlights an unrelated political issue that is again drawn into the argument. The caption containing the hint "*Hanya Najib sahaja layak sebut kangkung! Kami akan mempertahankan kalimah Kangkung sehingga cebisan kangkung yg terakhir*" ("Only Najib has the right to mention *kangkung*! We will defend the term *Kangkung* until the last shred of *kangkung*") is a strong reference to the ban and legal dispute surrounding the use of *Allah* by Malay-speaking Christians to refer to God (Aljazeera, 2014 ; BBC, 2014 ; WSJ, 2014). This too is an indirect *kategoria* against the Najib government's policy and draws a contrast between the two separate political issues.

Main premise: Right-wingers "defended" ("*mempertahankan*") the "term" ("*kalimah*") Allah is for Muslims only (indirect statement).

Minor premise: Defending the term *kangkung* is illogical (implied)

Conclusion: Defending Allah for Muslim only is as illogical as defending *kangkung* (omitted)

There is a challenge to Najib's *translatio* as it calls out his government's tendency to remain silent and disavow responsibility when controversies erupt. In this example it is the lack of action taken against extreme far-right groups that threatens others perceived to be challenging Muslims. This meme could therefore be a response to Najib's attempt to wriggle from the responsibility for the price rise in his speech.



Figure 6.8: "Defend kalimah *kangkung*" (C7) posted 14 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

6.3.2.2 C8

C8 (Figure 6.9) does not appear to have any strong political statement and is neither obviously *kategoria* nor *apologia*. The reds in a Marlboro cigarette pack have been replaced with a *kangkung* green. The words "20 *kangkung* cigarettes" may be a hint at the oxymoron that cigarettes can be healthy. There is also no indication as to what "EP" may stand for. Based on the word "ultra" in "ULTRAS@EP" stamped across the image it may be a reference to the ultra-right-wingers who are seen as strong supporters of Najib but this cannot be ascertained conclusively from the visual cues within the post, which attests to the polysemic nature of a humorous image like this. In fact, the doubleness to the meaning of memes is increasingly evident as this analysis progress, where on the

one hand, it is readable as a message in a rhetorical debate, and on the other it is semiotic inventiveness. C8 appears to be part of a series of memes similar to C2 that take things beyond politics. Similar to later memes (C9, C10, C11 and C12) the humour is pushed further and further and played with even more, almost like some form of competition among the meme producers to see who can come up with the more nonsensical and ridiculous meme, presumably to match the perceived foolishness of the original *kangkung* remark. The choice of Marlborough may be a cultural *topos* as it is iconic of the strong masculine male.



Figure 6.9: “Special Promo! The world’s FIRST...’HEALTHY Cigarettes!’” (C8) posted 14 January 2014 (“*Curi-curi Wang Malaysia*,” 2011).

6.3.2.3 C9

Similar to C8, C9 of Figure 6.10 is a play on a popular contemporary cultural icon and does not appear to have an overt political message, although the image of the Prime Minister provides a very loose link to politics. The original reds of fried chicken chain KFC have again been substituted with green, the face of founder Colonel Sanders replaced by that of Najib and the words KFC converted into KFB, to stand for *Kangkung Fried Belacan*, a description of a common way to cook *kangkung*: by frying it with a fermented dried prawn chilli paste called *belacan*, which incidentally makes up the

second cultural *topos*. Once again, this meme is ambiguous as to whether it is political or purely for fun.



Figure 6.10. "KFB" (C9) posted 14 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

6.3.2.4 C10

C10 (Figure 6.11) is also similar to C9, C8 and C2 in that there is no clear *kategoria* or *apologia* and appears to be an innocent playful take on the word *kangkung*, blended to the culturally iconic "King Kong" to render "KingKangKong" (with *kangkong* being a common variant spelling). The words "Akan Datang" ("Coming Soon") is a reference to movie posters. While appearing to be another meme done just for fun, this meme gives a nod to politics in the choice of the building: the UMNO headquarters. With no other semiotic clues available, the meme is deliberately polysemic and open to a variety of interpretations by the audience, and can be taken as pure fun or a jibe at politics.

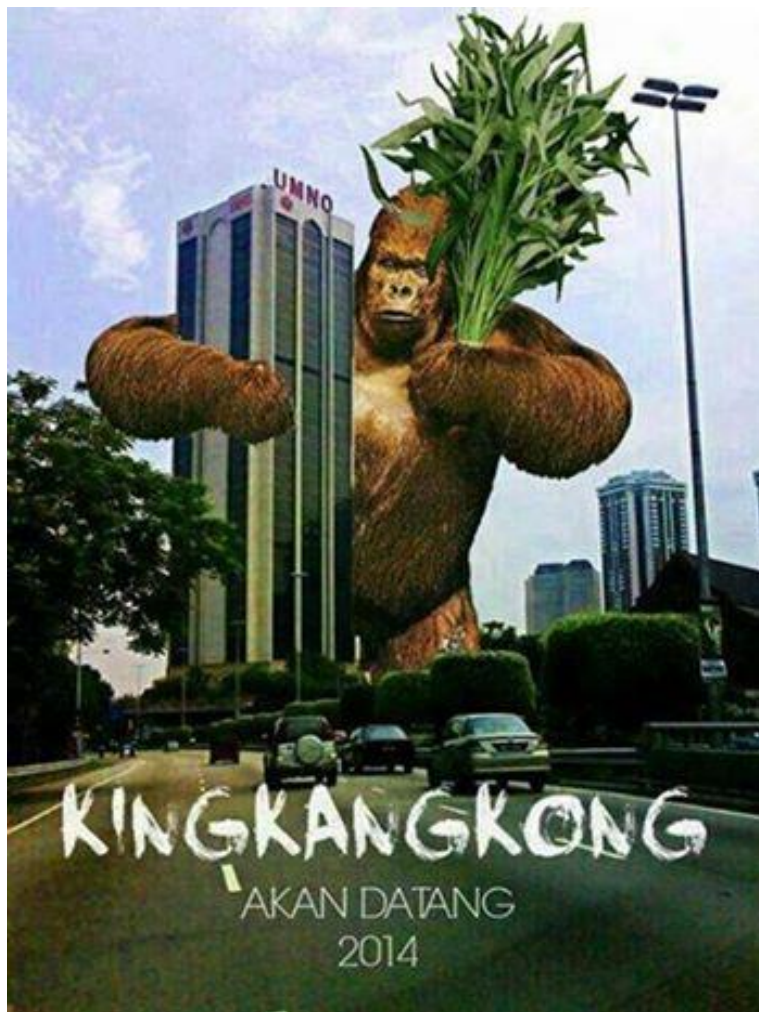


Figure 6.11: King Kang Kong (C10) posted 14 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

6.3.2.5 C11

C11 (Figure 6.12) continues the series of politically ambiguous memes that appear to merely play with the *kangkung* idea. The creator of the *McKangkung* meme substituted the meat with the vegetable and apart from the word *McKangkung*, and the vegetable, everything else within this meme can passably be authentically part of the iconography of McDonalds: Ronald McDonald, the burger, the company logo and slogan.



Figure 6.12: McKangkung (C11) posted 14 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

One possible interpretation of this meme is culture jamming, and a plausible reading would be that the vegetable is suggested as a viable substitute for meat to mitigate rising food prices, which would make it an oblique dig at Najib in terms of *qualitas*, i.e. the benefit the drop of the price of *kangkung* has brought. The syllogism would then be:

1. Main premise: meat is the central ingredient in a burger (implied by the McDonald's burger)
2. Minor premise: Najib's priority is to bring down price of *kangkung* (implied by *topos*)
3. Conclusion: *Kangkung* is now the substitute for meat because the Prime Minister places importance on it (omitted)

Interestingly, several weeks later McDonald's did try to capitalise on the *kangkung* mania and made an indirect reference to the vegetable in its McSavers advertisement (Figure 6.13) in which the

caption read “*harga sayur tidak turun, tapi harga burger tetap turun*” (“the price of vegetable may not have drop [sic], but the price of a burger has”). However, it was quickly retracted and McDonald’s Malaysia apologised for poking fun at the Prime Minister (Razak, 2014; TheRedPhoenix, 2014). This is a strong indication of the discomfort felt by the Najib government due to these ostensibly non-political images and hints at official intervention.



Figure 6.13: McDonald’s vegetable ad (Source <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/254034>).

6.3.2.6 C12

Although at first glance C12 (Figure 6.14) is similar to the previous four memes, this meme has a greater significance hidden within it. The meme depicts an elated woman who has just been proposed to but in place of the traditional diamond ring, a stalk of *kangkung* is used. This contrast between the vegetable and a valuable ring is to draw a comparison between the value of a ring and Najib’s choice of using the lowly vegetable to suggest that people have become better off since the price drop. This is a *kategoria* against the *qualitas* of the Prime Minister’s boast and challenges the *definitiva* that the government has done some good and the *qualitas* of this claim of improvement. The *topos* here is the cultural allusion to a typical marriage proposal. Once again there are two sides to the meme: on one hand there is a veiled message and at the same time the meme appears to be just for fun.

Main premise: Diamonds are valuable and used in marriage proposals (implied by scene)
 Minor premise: Najib is suggesting that *kangkung* is a valuable commodity (implied by *topos*)
 Conclusion: *Kangkung* can now be used to substitute diamonds (omitted)



Figure 6.14: *Kangkung* marriage proposal (C12) posted 14 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

6.3.2.7 C13

C13 (Figure 6.15) is another example of the multi-frame, produced by MG – the same creator of C4, and employs the same rhetorical technique of contradiction and fantasy theme. Opposition figure, Rafizi Ramli, from the People’s Justice Party or PKR (*Parti Keadilan Rakyat*) is shown as saying that if they (the Opposition) take over the government “[k]ita turun harga minyak” (“we will reduce oil prices”). The next frame shows a member of the UMNO women’s wing with a defiant fist in the air and the caption “*tak nak!!!*” (“don’t want!!!”). Rafizi in the third frame has the caption “*kita hapuskan tol*” (“we will abolish [road] toll”) and again, the woman in red shouts “*tak nak!!!*” The fifth frame has the Prime Minister declaring “*kita turunkan harga kangkung!*” (“we will reduce the price of *kangkung*”) and the response from the ladies is an ecstatic “*Horey!!!*” (“Hurray!!!”) The contradiction disposition form leads the audience to inevitably conclude that supporters of the Prime Minister are again foolish to reject sensible offers from the opposition party (reduced oil prices and abolishment of toll) but become overly excited that the government is able to offer reduced *kangkung* prices. The disparity between the values each party has to offer is stark and the choice of a good offer over a

trivial one is a *kategoria* targeting the character of the Prime Minister (as a poor leader) and the supporters, who lack sound judgment. The question of *coniectura* establishes that the offer of reduced oil and abolishment of toll was indeed made, although the reduction of the price of *kangkung* and the enthusiastic support of the ladies were more of a cunning sleight of hand as they did not literally happen as depicted. This worked by being sufficiently ridiculous and impossible so as to be recognisable as satire.



Figure 6.15: The Brains of MACAIS! (C13) posted 14 January 2014 ("*Curi-curi Wang Malaysia*," 2011).

It was an effective means to create the rhetorical fantasia that the government and their supporters have their priorities mislaid. The disposition form of commentary is when “the artist simply proffers the reader a perception as ‘truth’ without bothering to inform the reader about the clash or tension from which this ‘truth’ emerged” (Medhurst & DeSousa, 1981, p. 206) and is found here as the meme

creator presents the blind endorsement of the women without qualification. It may also be pertinent that the women's wing of UMNO was again chosen when there are many pictures of other assemblies available. The question of gender as a factor again suggests that women are perceived by this creator and his audience (presumably as a shared value) as not very sensible in the decision-making process and are sycophantic without due reasoning. The target of this *kategoria* is the supporters of the Prime Minister. It can also be a reflection that the Prime Minister is only supported by foolish women. Both the use of a political assembly and the highlighting of gender differences are political commonplaces. The third-order enthymeme plays out thus:

Main premise: The Opposition's offer of important benefits is rejected (stated)

Minor premise: The Prime Minister's offer of an inconsequential benefit is lauded (stated)

Conclusion: The supporters who rejected the former and rejoiced in the latter are illogical and foolish (omitted)

6.3.2.8 C14

C14 of Figure 6.16, a policy *kategoria*, continues with the idea that the vegetable has been given an inflated value and just like C12 it has become a symbol of worth. This yet again challenges the Prime Minister's *definitiva* and *qualitas* in his speech. The image is a reproduction of the toll charges signboards found at the many toll plazas along privately developed highways in Malaysia. However, in the place of the price for the various classes of vehicles, bunches of *kangkung* have replaced the monetary payment. *Kenderaan* (vehicle) *kelas 1* (class one) exacts a payment of "*kangkung 1 ikat*" ("one bunch of *kangkung*") and so on. The *topos* is an allusion to a common, identifiable cultural object—toll signs—and the *kategoria* is the unrealistic ascription of value to the *kangkung* by Najib, which is a question of *qualitas*. There is contrast here between the *kangkung* as legal tender versus the normal currency *ringgit*. In addition, road tolls are a political commonplace and a reference to Najib's failure to address the price of tolls.

E 5 LEBUHRAYA SHAH ALAM		
PLAZA TOL SUNWAY		
KENDERAAN	KELAS	KADAR TOL
	1	KANKONG 1 IKAT
	2	KANKONG 2 IKAT
	3	KANKONG 3 IKAT
 TEKSI	4	KANKONG 1 IKAT
	5	KANKONG 3 IKAT
SILA SEDIAKAN KANKONG TEPAT		

Figure 6.16: *Kangkung* toll (C14) posted 14 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

Major: Price of *kangkung* has economic significance (implied from context of PM's speech)

Minor: *Kangkung* has monetary significance (unstated)

Conclusion: We can use *kangkung* to pay toll (stated)

6.3.3 Analysis of posts on 15 January 2014 (C15-C17)

Only three posts were offered on the *kangkung* topic on 15 January, the third day after the speech, signalling a sharp drop in interest in the subject.

6.3.3.1 C15

It is not clear if the photo in C15 (Figure 6.17) is a posed photo or a manipulated photo. In either case, the post has the following text accompanying it:

Good Afternoon fellow TRUE Malaysians and CCWM'ers ,
Have you had your *KANGKUNG* already today???
Don't forget to have your *kangkung* for Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner!

Posted 15 January 2014 ("*Curi-curi Wang Malaysia*," 2011).



Figure 6.17: *Kangkung* Breakfast lunch dinner (C15) posted 15 January 2014 ("*Curi-curi Wang Malaysia*," 2011).

The photo of the young man at a table digging into a plate of raw *kangkung* in a spartan looking room implies a lack of possession, and by connotation, poverty. This is reinforced by the upper caps emphasis on “TRUE Malaysians” (which contrasts against the elites who are well-off and not in touch with “TRUE Malaysians” who struggle with the effects of high costs of living). The suggestion that they have “*kangkung* for Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner” implies that under the current government that

is all they can afford for food and challenges the *qualitas* of the Prime Minister's speech. Food and meal times are cultural allusions.

Main premise: "TRUE Malaysians" eat *kangkung* three times a day because they are poor (stated).

Minor premise: Ministers do not eat *kangkung* three times a day (implied by context).

Conclusion: Ministers are not "TRUE Malaysians" (omitted).

This conclusion would qualify as a *kategoria* of the elites' character.

6.3.3.2 C16

C16 (Figure 6.18) is another direct hit at the Prime Minister's 1Malaysia programme. It had been parodied to read "*Projek Kangkung 1 Malaysia*" ("1Malaysia *kangkung* project"). It is normal for national leaders to visit development projects in rural areas and in certain regions with large indigenous ethnic groups with their own unique customs and cultural garbs, leaders will dress themselves up similarly as a symbolic gesture to identify with them. In C16, the grass headdress has been manipulated into a crown of *kangkung* and the model of the project on the table, presumably some planned agricultural project, has been replaced by more *kangkung*. The Facebook post that accompanied this meme reads:

Prime Minister Najib's Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) and 'GENIUS' solution to Malaysia's economic woes.

The MEGA PROJECT= "Projek Usahawan *Kangkung* 1 Malaysia"
((PUK1MA)

posted 15 January 2014 ("*Curi-curi Wang Malaysia*," 2011)



Figure 6.18: The MEGA PROJECT (C16) posted 15 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

The text links the Economic Transformation Project (ETP) to *kangkung* and mocks Najib's "GENIUS" in the midst of Malaysia's economic woes. The fictitious name "Projek Usahawan *Kangkung* 1 Malaysia" ("1 Malaysia *Kangkung* Entrepreneur Projects") forms the acronym PUK1MA, which resembles a swear word in the Malay language. The *kategoria* is aimed both at his character ("genius" to imply the opposite) as well as his policies. The *topos* is a political commonplace as scenes of this nature are a frequent feature in newspapers whenever leaders visit development projects. Disposition forms—contradiction and commentary—are utilised here. The logic is identical to that for C6 and again questions the Najib government's promised *qualitas* transformation.

6.3.3.3 C17

C17 (Figure 6.19) is not a real visual meme but a poem presented visually. The poem was attributed to retired Royal Professor Ungku Aziz Ungku Abdul Hamid, who denied he was the author the very next day (Berita Harian, 2014).



Figure 6.19: Puisi Kangkong – Ungku Aziz (C17) posted 15 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

The poem consists of two couplets per verse and has two verses (see Table 6.4). The typical structure of a Malay poem is to have a couplet depicting a metaphor and the second couplet commenting on a contemporary issue. The metaphoric couplet is repeated in the second verse and a new contemporary couplet is inserted below it.

Couplet	Text	Translation
Title	<i>Puisi Kangkong</i>	<i>Kangkung poem</i>
A	<i>Pucuknya angkuh memanjat bukit</i>	The stem climbs the hill proudly
	<i>Tak sedar akar terendam air parit</i>	Unconscious that its root is dipped in ditch water
B	<i>Rakyat mengeluh lelah and sakit</i>	The people are sick and tired

	<i>Sedikit diberi banyak diungkit</i>	They receive a little but much has been taken from them
A	<i>Pucuknya angkuh memanjat bukit</i>	The stem climbs the hill proudly
	<i>Tak sedar akar terendam air parit</i>	Unconscious that its root is dipped in ditch water
C	<i>Bagaikan melepas anjing tersepit</i>	Like a trapped dog freed
	<i>Dah jadi pemimpin, rakyat digigit</i>	Once they become a leader, they bite the hands of the people

Table 6.4: *Kangkung* poem and translation.

The content of the poem is *kategoria* and attacks leaders in general as people who have forgotten their roots, grown proud and betrayed those who put them where they are today and hints at the *definitiva* of Najib's "not fair" remark. This is a literary *topos* and the internal structure of the poem itself employs a contrast between the metaphor and the literal. The visual contradiction is in the use of the Royal Professor as a signifier of wisdom, and his rejection of the *kangkung* politics as an implication that Najib is not wise, thus highlighting Najib's *bathos* once again through the use of high poetry for a lowly vegetable.

6.3.4 Analysis of post on 16 January 2014 (C18)

6.3.4.1 C18

Only one *kangkung* related post was found on the fourth day after the speech, suggesting a waning interest in the topic. However, C18 (Figure 6.20) is important in that it is the only sample of a meme produced by a supporter of the Prime Minister's party that has been posted in CCWM and is both a *kategoria* and *apologia*. It is not clear if this was included by CCWM to boost the flagging interest in order to keep it alive a little longer, or if it was to demonstrate how slow responses are by the Prime Minister's supporters to defend him. The CCWM post accompanying this meme reads "It seems that BN supporters on the DEFENSIVE mode...lols!" and suggests an *apologia*.



Figure 6.20: BN supporters on the DEFENSIVE (C18) posted 15 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

The three panels show the contradiction and counter *kategoria* at *Pakatan* (the opposition coalition) for ignoring what the government has done. The first panel on the left, with a picture of Najib, lists the things done by the government at various times. The information was taken from a speech at a rally on 12 January in the Astaka Field of the town Chukai in the Kemaman district, which is in the state of Terengganu. It is followed by a reference to his speech in the middle panel, and criticism of the Prime Minister's critics in the last:

Panel	Text	Translation
Left	<i>Yang Diumumkan</i>	What was announced
	<i>RM96 juta untuk mangsa bantuan banjir</i>	RM96 million as aid for flood victims
	<i>19205 keluarga</i>	19205 families
	<i>Bantuan barangan bernilai RM5000, televisyen, peti sejuk, dapur, tilam and bantal</i>	Household goods worth RM5000, televisions, refrigerators, stoves, mattresses and pillows
	<i>Bantuan Wang Tunai</i>	Cash

Middle	<i>RM500 daripada kerajaan pusat</i>	RM500 from the federal government
	<i>RM1500 daripad kerajaan negeri</i>	RM1500 from the state government
	<i>Yang ditonjolkan</i>	What is highlighted
	<i>Bukan semua harga naik sebab kerajaan...harga ikan naik sebab ikan kurang, harga sayuran naik disebabkan bekalan kurang...ada masa dia naik ada masa diturun. Hari ini dalam surat khabar saya baca ada yang dah turun. Kangkung dahulu naik, sekarang dah turun...bila turun kenapa tak puji kerajaan...masa naik, dipersalahkan kerajaan</i>	Not all price hikes are due to the government...fish prices increase because supply of fish drops, vegetable prices rise because supply is low...at times they rise, at times they drop. Today I read in the papers some have dropped. <i>Kangkung</i> was high, now it is low....when low why no praise for the government...when it rises, the government is blamed
	<i>Yang diingati</i>	What is remembered
	<i>Penyokong pakatan rakyat hanyalah...</i>	Supporters of Pakatan Rakyat is all about...
	<i>Kangkung! Kangkung!</i>	<i>Kangkung! Kangkung!</i>
	<i>Kangkung!</i>	<i>Kangkung!</i>
Right		

Table 6.5: Translation of C18.

There is a significantly different structure in the rhetoric of C18. It is formal and the juxtaposition of what was announced, what has been highlighted and what is remembered is a reasoned argument that tries to support the Prime Minister's *coniectura*, *qualitas* and *translatio*. The first panel sought to establish the *coniectura*; the fact that the government has disbursed funds and essential goods to the needy after the floods shows the *qualitas* of its effort. The second panel is a recapitulation of the *translatio* that prices are subject to supply-demand dynamics of the market beyond the control, hence the jurisdiction, of the government. The third panel together with the second question reinforces the *translatio*: is this really the government's fault? *Definitiva* is not obviously stated.

While the rhetoric is well-structured, the syllogism, despite its complete form, is not strong, as the flow from main premise to minor premise does not logically lead to the conclusion in the last panel.

1. Main premise: The government has done good things (stated)
2. Minor premise: The rise in cost is not due to the government (stated)
3. Conclusion: Pakatan supporters are only looking at *kangkung* (stated)

There was no attempt at humour or wit and the overstatement risks making it appear to be trying too hard and creating new *bathos*.

6.3.4.2 Analysis of posts on 17 January 2014 (C19-C20)

6.3.4.3 C19

C19 (Figure 6.21) is a visual representation of the Prime Minister defending his use of *kangkung* to make his point, and is a *kategoria* of his character. In the main text of this post the Prime Minister's explanation was reproduced:

Prime Minister Najib Razak said that he was using *kangkung* (water spinach) as an example of how market forces determine the prices of food commodities.

He said certain quarters should not make fun of the matter after his remark on the vegetable was the subject of ridicule on social media.

"I like to eat *kangkung*, you all like to eat *kangkung*. As such, I gave an example which everybody eats. If I use quail as an example, only certain people eat it.

"The example should not be ridiculed by anybody because I gave the example on the principle of supply and demand which decides the prices of some of the food commodities which are not subject to price controls," he said.

(Malaysiakini, 2014)



Figure 6.21: Najib replies (C19) posted 17 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011).

However, the visual message here has been framed differently to the context. The use of bold green to emphasise *kangkung* twice in the first sentence underscores the association of the vegetable with “everyone”. The first sentence is the Prime Minister’s attempt to associate himself with ordinary citizens because “everybody eats *kangkung*”, making it the lowest common denominator. However, the selection and inclusion of the third sentence (that only certain people eat quail) betrayed his elitist mind set, and excludes many who do not eat quail.

Main premise: Everybody eats *kangkung* (stated)

Minor premise: Only some eat quail (stated)

Conclusion: The Prime Minister eats quail and is therefore not part of everybody
(omitted)

This meme is sophisticated in the sense that the message is the *apologia* of the Prime Minister but it has been framed in such a way that it subtly creates a commentary that becomes a *kategoria* of him at the same time. The selective text challenges a new set of *coniectura*, *definitiva*, *qualitas* and *translatio* of Najib’s defence (that everybody eats *kangkung*, which implies that everyone is in the same boat and that everyone is better off with the *kangkung* price drop) and calls out his disingenuousness.

6.3.4.4 C20

The *topos* of the last meme (Figure 6.22) is from the movie *Lord of the Rings* (P. Jackson, 2001) where the character Boromir responds to the Council of Elrond's insistence that the accursed ring must be cast into the fires of Mount Doom by uttering the now memorable phrase, "one does not simply walk into Mordor". The picture of Boromir, played by Sean Bean, with the phrase "one does not simply..." has since been turned into an image-macro where various phrases have been substituted for "...walk into Mordor" (Blubber, 2004). Taken out of the context of origin, the substitute phrase "...raise the price of *kangkung*" mocks the trivial nature of the vegetable that is contrasted against the seriousness of the dangers of Mordor. It is a gentle *kategoria* of Najib's policy and it associates him with all the other things that have been mocked via the image.



Figure 6.22: One does not simply raise the price of *kangkung* (C20), posted 17 January 2014 ("Curi-curi Wang Malaysia," 2011)

6.4 Discussion

6.4.1 Stases

The Prime Minister, as a dominant occupier of public space and a veteran rhetor, demonstrated clear awareness of rhetorical principles in his speech. In an attempt to engage his audience, he utilised rhetorical questions, Aristotelian syllogism, specifically the enthymeme of the third order and took pains to cover the *coniectura*, *definitiva*, *qualitas* and *translatio* questions. However, his effort did not go unchallenged and various memes dismissed or rejected his arguments, cast doubts or simply mocked them. The memes that addressed at least one stasis are: C3, C17, C12, and C14 (*definitiva*); C4, C6, C7, C12, C13, C14, C15, C16 (*qualitas*) and C4, C7 (*translatio*).

All four *stases* were present in both C18 and C19, a meme by the Prime Minister's supporter as well as the meme based on Najib's defence of his use of *kangkung*. The rest of the seven memes (C2, C5, C20, C8, C9, C10 and C11) avoided the *stases* altogether. None of the memes challenged the *coniectura* of the Prime Minister though. Figure 6.23 visually represents the distribution of stases among memes (excluding C18 and C19).

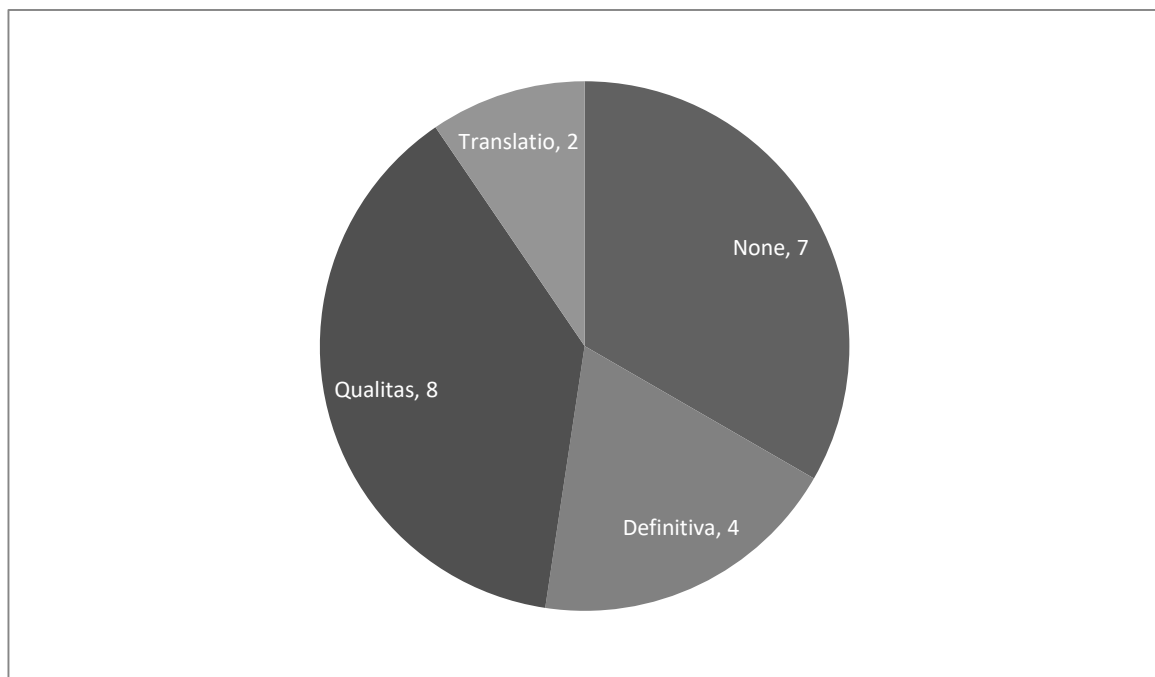


Figure 6.23: Distribution of stases among memes (excluding C18 and C19).

6.4.2 *Kategoria/ apologia*

C2, C8, C9, C10 and C11 were non-argumentative in that they were neither overtly *kategoria* nor *apologia* and appear to belong in their own category of cheeky, playful memes without any obvious

political message, although the political nature is evident. While C18 and C19 are both *apologia* in nature, the rest were highly critical *kategoria* (character: C4, C13, C15, C17, and policy: C3, C6, C7, C12, C14, C16, C20).

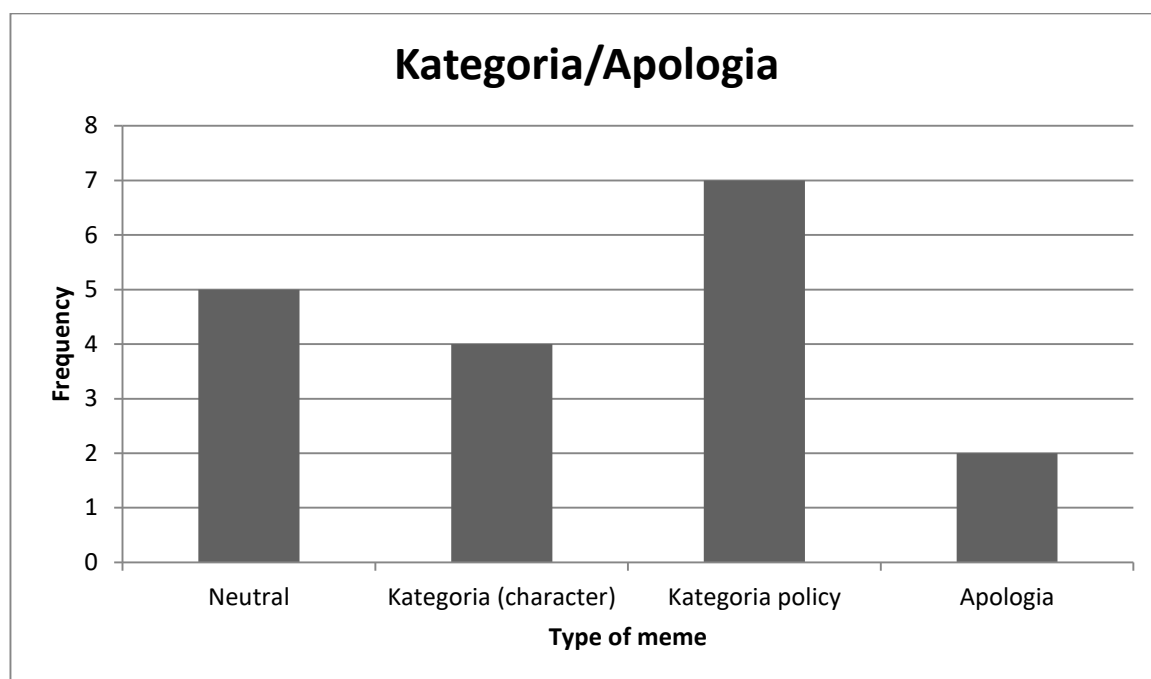


Figure 6.24: Distribution of *kategoria/apologia* memes.

6.4.3 *Enthymemes*

For the memes that employed *Enthymemes*, nine (C3, C6, C7, C11, C12, C13, C15, C16, C19) were of the third order where the conclusions were omitted. Only one example of a second order enthymeme (C14) was found. In the Prime Minister’s original speech, he used a first order enthymeme where the major premise was omitted. Instead, he gave his very categorical conclusion, that it is not fair to blame the government for price rises. C4 picked this up and extended and expanded the conclusion to exaggerate the Prime Minister’s *bathos* by providing several interpretations of Najib’s conclusion. The higher frequency of third order *Enthymemes* is not surprising as it is an effective way to lead an audience to a foregone conclusion. It is a popular method for teaching (for example, when a teacher states “If x equals 7 and y equals 3, what then is $x+y$?”) and it can be seen in the memes a certain didactic element present presumably to educate the audience to

reach the same conclusion. The first and second order *Enthymemes* assume the premises are already known. C14's syllogism is as follows:

Major: Price of *kangkung* has economic significance (implied from context of PM's speech)

Minor: *Kangkung* has monetary significance (unstated)

Conclusion: We can use *kangkung* to pay toll (stated)

Because of the prevailing interest in the Prime Minister's *kangkung* faux pas the minor premise that *kangkung* has monetary significance can be safely presumed. Similarly, when the Prime Minister used the first order enthymeme, he was not being presumptuous to leave out the main premise that the government is responsible for controlling food price, as that would be a given in most well run countries.

Main premise: The government is responsible for keeping food prices stable (unstated).

Minor premise: *Kangkung* price has dropped (stated).

Conclusion: Therefore, the government is responsible and deserves credit (stated).

6.4.4 *Topoi*

Literary/cultural allusions are the most common kind of *topos* utilised in the creation of these memes (C2, C8, C9, C10, C11, C12, C14, C15, C17, C20) followed by political commonplaces (C4, C13, C14, C16, C19). Only four memes (C3, C6, C7, and C18) drew from idiosyncratic and transient themes and two targeted personal character traits (C3 & C19). The high use of literary and cultural references as *topoi* is not surprising in a multi-cultural society like Malaysia where shared cultural objects form the foundation for communication cultural ghettos notwithstanding⁵⁶. While political commonplaces are also shared, they only aroused half the interest compared to cultural ones. Idiosyncratic themes demonstrate the meme creators' awareness of current affairs and although just short of half of the culture group as well, together with political commonplaces, they

⁵⁶ The various ethnic groups have their own cultural practices in their mother-tongue that are not always accessible to outsiders. However, due to the common educational system the majority of Malaysians go through, one where the Malay language is compulsory for obtaining the most basic of high school qualifications, there exists a large common space of communication for Malaysians. In this space the Malay language is dominant, but there is also an infusion of English that comes from Malaysia's colonial heritage, and also from the foreign entertainment media. Within this common space, elements from the other ethnic groups have also been appropriated into the mainstream vernacular.

are nearly an equal proportion in comparison. Figure 6.25 visually represents the distribution of *topoi* used to create memes.

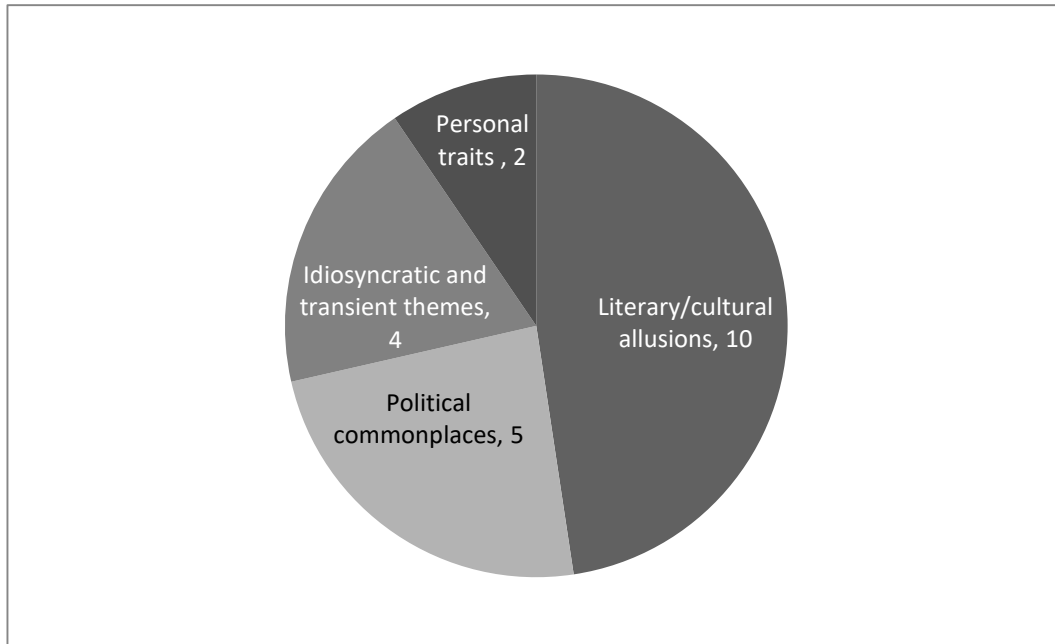


Figure 6.25: *Topoi* used to create memes.

6.4.5 Disposition forms

Contrast stands out as the prevailing disposition form with eleven memes utilising this (C2, C3, C7, C8, C9, C10, C11, C12, C15, C17, and C20). Four memes had commentary as their disposition form (C6, C13, C14, and C19) and only two contradictions (C4, C18).

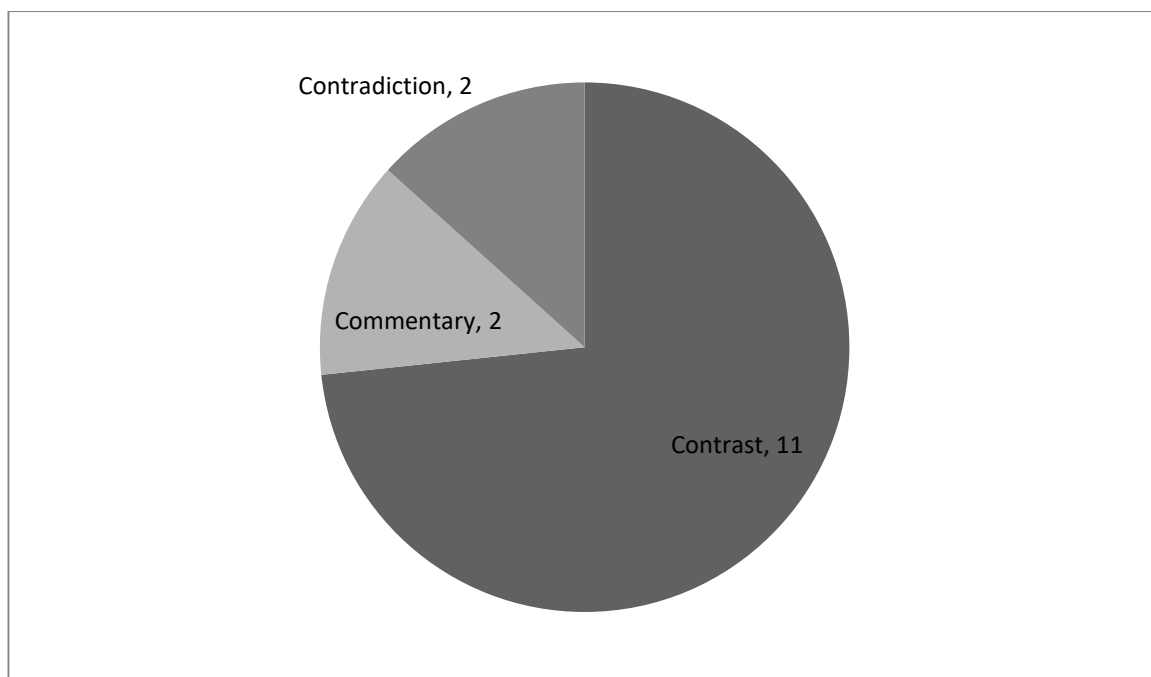


Figure 6.26: Distribution of disposition forms.

6.5 Conclusion

It is interesting that the Prime Minister's effort to provide a strong logical validity to his rhetoric by covering all four formal *stases* did not yield the desired result. Part of this failure could be due to the *bathos* he created for himself, which was quickly spotted by his critics as disingenuous. His supporters similarly offered an *apologia* that was steeped in the four *stases*, but the arguments were similarly dismissed. About a third of the memes on *kangkung* did not even address any of the four *stases* but chose instead to capitalise and exaggerate Najib's *bathos*. The memes that attacked Najib's *stases* avoided *coniectura* as the facts were difficult to dispute. Instead, focus was placed on the *definitiva* and *qualitas* aspects of Najib's argument as they are highly subjective and open to interpretation.

The lack of *apologia* memes (discounting C18 and C19, both of which represent Najib's side of the debate) suggests that the members of the public were literally unapologetic for their views, despite the counter-criticisms by the Prime Minister and his supporters. Of course, the fact that Najib and his supporters generally do not inhabit this particular online space would also mean that no interlocutors were present to defend Najib and his allies. It is significant that a majority of the *kategoria* memes

attacked policies rather than personal characteristics, as it suggests a rational rather than a personal attitude of the meme creators. The seven non-argumentative memes avoided confrontation altogether.

Third order *Enthymemes* are the most common mode of reasoning used and lend a non-threatening, didactic feel to the memes. When the major and minor premises are stated, viewers are steered toward an expected conclusion, an approach similar to an encouraging school teacher eliciting answers from students. The high frequency of the use of contrast (rather than contradiction or commentary) as a disposition form corroborates this observation as this manoeuvre is less forceful and does not impose a particular viewpoint or position on the audience, unlike in the use of contradiction, which corners the viewer to arrive at very limited plausible conclusions. The low number of the personal characteristics *topos* reinforces the earlier suggestion that the online public is attempting to engage in the discourse on a more rational rather than a personal, *ad hominem* level. Working collectively, as a rhetorical act, the memes create, on the whole, a gentler impetus that is no less effective, as evidenced by the successful provocation of a response from the Prime Minister, his supporters and the fact that even the interest of the international media was aroused. This chapter demonstrates that despite the disparate and varied memes by different contributors, each responding to certain aspects of the Prime Minister's speech, they work in tandem to present a more complete response, as each complements or covers what is lacking in the others. It hints at the notion of the "wisdom of the crowd" often found in studies on media like Wikipedia that produces information of quality through the coordination of various contributions by a curator of memes like CCWM, or in the case of the previous chapter, SGAG. By doing so critical "accuracy, completeness and clarity" emerges (Kittur & Kraut, 2008).

The analysis in this chapter also supports the earlier proposition that the political cartoon and the political joke have converged, and that memes are a confluence of different humour media. By drawing from the contiguous scholarship of political cartoons it was found that deeper insight into the communicative aspect of memes could be obtained. The visual properties of the memes have various rhetorical elements, like Medhurst and DeSousa's (1981) *topoi* and Ryan's *apologia* and *kategoria*, and Aristotle's classic syllogism. These elements can all be seen working together to form a visual message, much like the political cartoon.

7 Case Study four: Teresa Kok

The final case study broadens the scope of this investigation into how citizen satire can go beyond static visual memes by examining a satirical video. The importance of this particular case study lies in the fact that the producer of the video in question, Teresa Kok, was a member of the Malaysian Parliament. Given that in her official role as a parliamentarian she has access to a formal platform for speaking up, it is a pertinent question to ask why she utilised a humorous medium to convey her messages. The theoretical footings of this case are informed by studies on “The Daily Show” and the “Colbert Report” in the United States. These television programmes feature entertainers Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert making influential political commentaries that are a mix of politics and humour that have had great public appeal. These have attracted a tremendous amount of scholarly scrutiny spanning more than a decade (J. Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; G. Baym, 2005; Brewer & Marquardt, 2007; Cao, 2010; Colletta, 2009; Faina, 2013; Hmielowski, Holbert, & Lee, 2011; Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton, 2007; LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009; Pavlik, 2005; Warner, 2007). Of these, Jones, Baym, and Day’s (2012) account of Stewart and Colbert’s destabilising foray away from television into the real-life political arena meaningfully informs my fourth and final case study.

Predictability and a sense of constancy are maintained when respective players remain within their neatly demarcated boundaries of politics, journalism and entertainment. However, when Stewart and Colbert stepped out of television to directly engage political institutions, a destabilising effect was observed in all three spheres. In an interesting twist that mirrors Stewart and Colbert but in the opposite direction, MP Teresa Kok’s satirical video sees a prominent political actor crossing over into the entertainment arena, possibly resulting in a similar destabilisation of the political arena in Malaysia, albeit to a lesser degree. Austin’s (2013) concept of the performative serves as a useful resource to unpack some consequences that resulted from Kok’s use of an alternative performance platform in addition to the traditional one that is already available to her as a member of parliament.

In 2014 Kok posted a satirical Chinese New Year (CNY) video greeting to her constituency (Kok, 2014a). Set in a talk show where fictitious feng shui masters (Chinese geomancers) dispensed advice for the New Year, her video was critical of the government’s policies and indirectly poked fun at

certain prominent figures. The unparalleled occurrence of a prominent political actor in Malaysia venturing in the politics-to-entertainment direction broke convention and earned her rebukes from political opponents as well as some of her own followers: her behaviour was unbecoming of a parliamentarian and an indulgence in unprofitable pursuit of cheap publicity. However, these criticisms may well be premature, as the full effect of her action, her sedition charge notwithstanding, has not been properly evaluated.

For a proper assessment, it is critical to ask how her video is politically different to what she does as a parliamentarian, and how her video contributes to the wider public discourse beyond the limited public spheres of Facebook and YouTube. By examining these strategies the nature of the “emerging non-traditional methods of activism and advocacy” (Jones, et al., 2012, p. 35) is better understood. This chapter examines what the satirical video achieved for Kok that could not have been accomplished otherwise in parliament. It also explores the dialectical relationship that emerged from her crossover and the implications this has for how politics will be conducted and communicated.

7.1 Background information

Malaysia has a tradition of airing public service announcement video clips during festive seasons, for example, the Indian Diwali festival, the Muslim Ramadhan celebration, and Christmas. They are aired on television to foster harmony, mutual understanding and respect among the different ethnic and religious groups of the multi-cultural Malaysian society. Previously, Government agencies were the primary producers of these videos but lately, clips sponsored or produced by large corporations, for example Petronas the national oil company, have become common. With the Internet and YouTube, individuals or groups representing smaller organisations are also producing their own video for their own patrons or customers.

Kok’s video was a Chinese Lunar New Year greeting for her fan base, which at the time of writing numbers 131,000 on Facebook. Kok began experimenting with satire in 2013 (Kok, 2013) by blending the festive greeting with political messages and humour. However, it was her 2014 video

(Kok, 2014a) that stirred controversy and ended with her being charged for sedition. Kok claimed trial⁵⁷ in May 2014.

The video utilised a fusion of Cantonese and Mandarin dialogue punctuated with Malay words, a common communicative technique that appeals to the Chinese urban electorate. Kok hosts a fictitious TV talk show with a guest panel of three feng shui masters: Master Yen, Brother Wai and Mrs Jit. Most notable is the character of Mrs. Jit, a portly woman with a big hairdo whom viewers have associated with the Prime Minister's wife who has a similar body shape and hairstyle. In the video, the panellists were posed questions based on topics typically asked of feng shui masters around the new year season—relationship, career, business—and these provided the basis for the fake studio audience to extend questions to current affairs.

The interview with Kok took place on 18 October 2014 at her office and was recorded and transcribed. The transcription was analysed qualitatively by reading and re-reading the transcript for recurring themes, following the recommendations of Aronson (1994), Boyatzis (1998), Seale (2004) and Smith (1992). Sections relevant to the aims of the investigation were highlighted and classified. These have been compiled and included as Appendix: Teresa Kok – Interview.

⁵⁷ In Malaysian and Singaporean legal practice, “If you claim trial, this means that you dispute the charge and would like a court hearing to defend yourself. You will be asked if you wish to engage a lawyer if you are in person” (State Courts Singapore, 2016).



Figure 7.1: Screenshot of Kok’s Facebook Video page. (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/TeresaKokSuhSim?fref=ts>).

Five videos, also available on YouTube, were posted on Kok’s Facebook page. The first was a 15-second trailer titled Teresa’s CNY Feng shui trailer (24 January 2014) and was not analysed. The primary 11:38 minutes video Teresa Kok’s *ONederful* Malaysia CNY 2014 Video (28 January 2014) sparked the controversy and therefore received the most attention. After the controversy erupted, Kok on 5 February 2014 posted a 12-second clip, Ma Lai” (马来) dalam Mandarin bermaksud “kuda

datang, which was an extract of the introduction of the previous video with an explanatory text clarifying the title (discussed in detail below) that she thought offended her political opponents. A 13 February 2014 post was of her interview with KiniTalk, an alternative media news outlet. Here she “talks to KiniTV's Prasad Michael about having fun, receiving threats and enduring the worst of what Malaysian politics has to offer” (KiniTV, 2014a). This interview was analysed to cross check the primary video analysis and against the personal interview with me. On 21 February 2014 (Kok, 2014b) the video was reposted with Malay subtitles. This video was also not analysed as it has (with the exception of subtitles in a different language) identical content to the original video. English subtitles have been provided in the video and these have been transcribed and included in Appendix: Transcript.

7.2 Methodology

7.2.1 Analytical Tools

A variety of tools were used to examine this case. Kok’s Facebook page was mined for statistical data to build a picture of the trends, likes, shares as well as the chronology of the events and comments. Basic calculations of mean for the frequency of likes and shares are made and these were compared with statistics of her earlier video posts.

The dialogue within the video was first transcribed verbatim (see Appendix: Teresa Kok’s “*ONEderful*” Malaysia CNY 2014 Video: Subtitles). The structure of the video was identified and the main sections categorised. Then I utilised Raskin’s Semantic Script Theory of Humour (Raskin, 1985) to identify the literary tropes used in this satirical commentary on Malaysian social-politics. The rhetorical analysis method described in Chapter 6 (see 6.2 Analytical Tools) was also applied to the transcription to identify the way Kok conveyed her message.

A textual analysis of the comments of Kok's Facebook followers also provided insights into the way Kok's use of humour had been received and enables us to gain a better understanding of the broader sentiments of both her followers as well as her opponents.

A face-to-face interview with Kok was conducted, and an audio recording, as recommended by Stokes (2003) and Fielding & Thomas (2008), was made and a transcription of the interview made, as described in the earlier section. A transcription of Kok's interview with KiniTV was also made. These were then analysed and compared according to the procedure described earlier (Aronson, 1994; Boyatzis, 1998; Seale, 2004; Smith, 1992).

7.3 Findings

As this is a different medium, i.e. a video instead of memes, it was appropriate that Anderson's (2012) four-pointed mediascape compass be applied as a whole again to map this new slice of the mediascape under study.

7.3.1 Properties

A total of 6 videos were posted in relation to the Chinese New Year (CNY) video: a trailer, the video itself, a clarification video, an interview with KiniTV, a repost of the video with Malay subtitles and an excerpt of the uproar in parliament over this issue. The entire Chinese New Year controversy lasted a little more than a month (43 days) before other national news redirected the public's focus. Table 7.1 and Figure 7.2 graphically capture the statistics of the videos.

Date	Video title	Likes	Shares
24 Jan 14	<i>Teresa's CNY Feng shui trailer</i>	1129	302
28 Jan 14	<i>Teresa Kok's ONEderful Malaysia CNY 2014 Video</i>	5064	17,114
05 Feb 14	<i>"Ma Lai" (马来) dalam Mandarin bermaksud...</i>	2503	737
13 Feb 14	<i>KiniTalk: Teresa Kok on gutter politics and true...</i>	874	518
21 Feb 14	<i>ONEderful Malaysia CNY 2014 (sarikata BM)</i>	2210	2366

Table 7.1: Summary of video posts: Likes and Shares.

The 28 January video saw an obvious spike in likes and shares. Ignoring this single anomaly, if the other five videos were taken to be the norm, the likes were noted to be within a narrow range – from 874 to 2503, giving a difference of 1629. The mean for likes for these five videos is 1563. Contrasting the 5064 likes for *ONEderful* with this mean, the increase was three-fold. The mean shares for the five videos at 1026 were in general lower than the number of likes.

However, the *ONEderful* video shares (17,114) saw an increase by a factor of 17 from the average of other videos. To get a sense of the popularity of this video, Kok's CNY video for the previous year in 2013, had only 2,840 likes and was shared only 9,863 times – both respective numbers being roughly half of those for *ONEderful*. Kok claimed in parliament (0:40 to 0:50) that not many people watched the video initially but it was only after the Lenggong MP, and UMNO members in general, raised the complaint that people became curious and watched the video for themselves to see what the fuss was about (KiniTV, 2014b). This is a plausible explanation for the spike.

Kok made another video (The Rakyat Post, 2015) for the 2015 Chinese New Year but this was not posted on her Facebook page; the video is only available on YouTube. This YouTube video was posted by 1goatyear 1greatyear (2015) instead of DAP Seputeh – Kok's official channel ("DAP" being her party name and "Seputeh" her constituency) and the reason could be the need to keep a lower profile while her court case was ongoing.

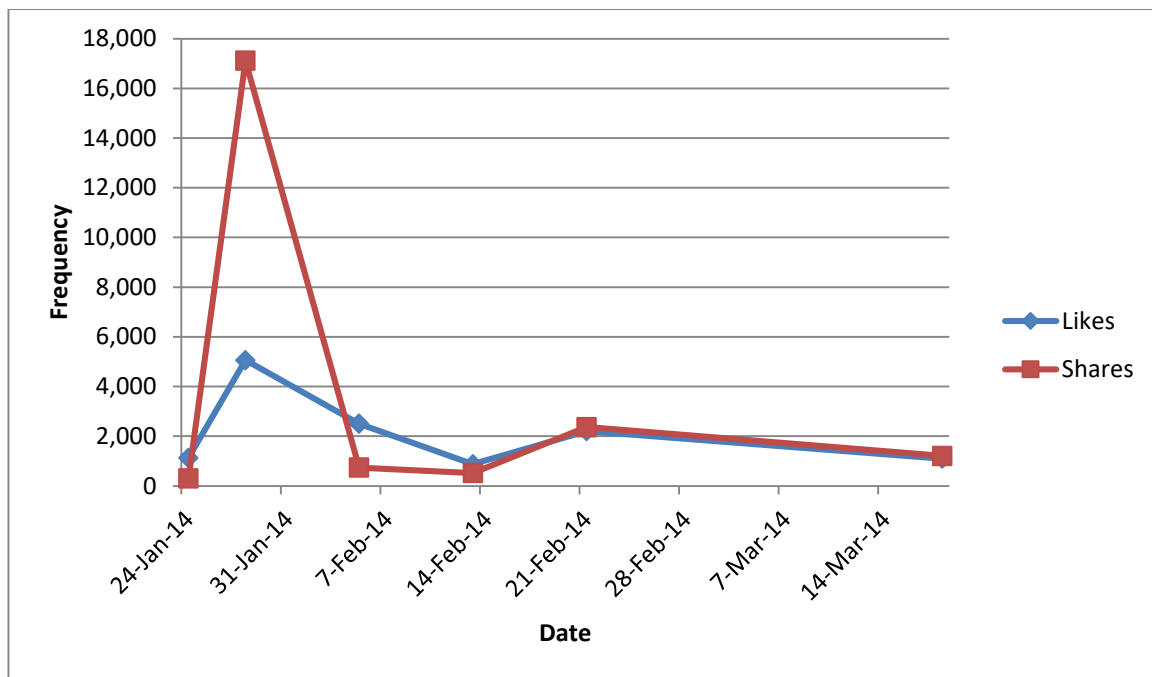


Figure 7.2: Major spike in Shares and Likes for the “ONEderful: CNY 2014 video.

Kok’s Facebook statistics do not provide a complete picture of the impact of her video because the video is also accessible in YouTube, and the number of views there has to be taken into account as well. There were a total of three Chinese New Year videos made by Kok (for the years 2013, 2014 and 2015) on her official channel, DAP Seputeh (see Figure 7.3). The number of views for these videos on YouTube is found in Table 7.2, and a spike similar to the Facebook statistics can be seen for the 2014 video.

	Views of CNY Video		
	2013	2014	2015
DAP Seputeh	250944 (Pt 1)	708539	2,054
	+191637 (Pt 2)		
	442581		

Table 7.2: Comparison of CNY videos on DAP Seputeh YouTube Channel.

The number of views for the 2015 CNY video is only 2,054. This is significantly lower compared to previous years, possibly due to the fact that Chinese New Year was only a month ago at the time of writing. Also, the video was much less provocative, probably due to the ongoing court case, and did

not attract any strong reaction. The total views for the two-part 2013 CNY video were just a little over half of the number the 2014 video garnered, despite having had a full year's head start.

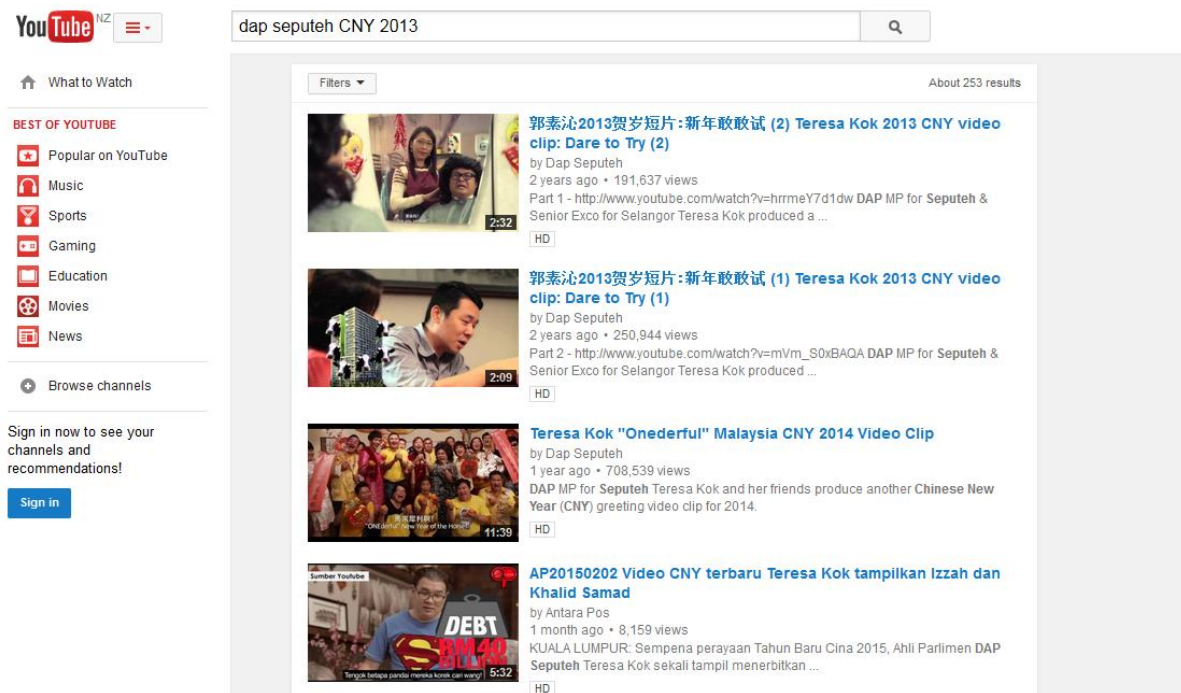


Figure 7.3: Screenshot of YouTube search for DAP Seputeh.
Source: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=DAP+seputeh+CNY+2013

The final video (KiniTV, 2014b) was a 03:30 minutes clip of the parliamentary sitting where Kok was accused on March 17 by her political opponent, MP for Lenggong, Shamsul Anuar Nasarah , as having “insulted Islam” through her video. This video provides evidence that allows us to evaluate whether the accusation against Kok was justified. As the video clip recorded the pandemonium that broke out in parliament, the exchange of words was not always clear and an attempt to translate and transcribe the proceedings was abandoned.

7.3.1.1 Comments

The *ONederful* Malaysia video drew a total of 306 comments (see Appendix: Comments). Two of these were Kok’s own responses early on in the thread and one a request to her to respond to another question. Thirty-two strongly disapproved of her video. Twenty-four posts had no content except for names of friends who were tagged. Forty-three comments had no direct bearing on the video and were complaints and criticisms of Kok or concerned unrelated issues. These have been categorised as Non

sequiturs as they do not relate back to the point of the video. The remaining posts were compliments and praise for the video (161) and followers defending Kok's character, action or her video (31). Six posts were blank. Five were uncategorised because the comments were incoherent due to poor English. Table 7.3 shows the ratio of negative comments to compliments is 1:4.9. The implications of the various categories will be discussed further in the processes section.

Comments	Frequency
Disapprove	33
Approve	161
Sharing	24
Kok's interaction	3
Argumentative	31
<i>Non sequiturs</i>	43
Blank	6
Uncategorised	5
Total	306

Table 7.3: Categories and comment counts.

7.3.1.2 Rhetorical techniques: *topoi* and *kategoria*

Similar to the preceding chapter's analysis of visual memes, in the analysis of this video the first step was to discover the subject matter that the satirist drew from. Kok's *ONEderful* video can be divided into ten neat divisions, seven of which represent the topical focus (see Table 7.4).

Paragraph number	Divisions
1-2	Introduction of programme
3-7	Introduction of guests
8-13	Economy
14-25	Travel / security
26-31	Education
32-35	Protest/freedom of speech
36-40	Investment
41-48	MCA
49-53	LO SI-MA

Table 7.4: Major divisions within the video.⁵⁸

The analysis of these divisions found echoes of Medhurst and DeSousa's (1981) four major inventional *topoi* – cultural allusions, situational themes, political commonplace, personal characteristic traits. The setting of the programme, a talk show where three Feng shui experts are interviewed before an audience, is an obvious cultural allusion. The talk show format will be familiar to audiences who watch a lot of Chinese television programmes. Feng shui is the other cultural allusion to a traditional practice that is especially relevant during a Chinese New Year celebration, when celebrants anticipate what the new year will bring.

The economy, national security and education fall under the political commonplaces *topos* that Medhurst and DeSousa describe as the *raison d'être* of political cartoons (p. 200). This *topos* appeared in paragraphs 8-13 (economy) and paragraphs 26-31 (education) and does not appear to form a major part of the video, which suggests that they may not be its *raison d'être*. Instead, the situational themes *topos* is more prominent. The section on protest/freedom of speech in paragraphs 32-35 was an allusion to the unprecedented Bersih rallies in Kuala Lumpur where citizens came out to brave riot police in 2007, 2011 and 2012 to press for electoral reforms (Gooch, 2011; The Telegraph, 2012).

In paragraphs 14-25, the description of Malaysia “as number 6 of the most dangerous countries in the world and it is the only country from Asia” referred to a website making this claim that was disputed by major Malaysian newspaper The Star (Bedi, 2013). However, the video pressed this issue by alluding to the Taiwan tourist to Sabah who was shot dead and the woman kidnapped in November 2013 (Vanar, 2013), which raised concerns about the deterioration of national security as the perpetrators were believed to be “Philippines’ Abu Sayyaf militant Islamist group” (AFP, 2013).

Paragraph number	Divisions	<i>Kategori</i>
1-2	Introduction of programme	Nil

⁵⁸ All references to the text here and thereafter are to the transcribed version in the appendix.

3-7	Introduction of guests	Nil
8-13	Economy	Policy/Character
14-25	Travel / security	Policy
26-31	Education	Policy
32-35	Protest/freedom of speech	Policy
36-40	Investment	Character
41-48	MCA	Character
49-53	LO SI-MA	Character
54-64	Closing	Nil

Table 7.5: *Kategoria* analysis of the video.

The majority of the *kategoria* are policy rather than character (Table 7.5). The personal character traits *topos* targeted the Prime Minister’s wife Rosmah Mansor (paragraphs 49-53) and the Malaysian Chinese Association (41-48). Paragraphs 36-37 are a *kategoria* of the Prime Minister’s stepson, as a reference was made to “property at New York Manhattan... [with] very good *feng shui* and extremely cheap too” and where “7 room apartment only costs RM100 million. Super cheap”. This is partly a situational themes *topos* as it is also an allusion to the recent report on flamboyant Malaysian financier Jho Low – who was closely connected to the Prime Minister’s family – and his purchase of luxury condominiums in Manhattan worth US\$23.98-million that were reportedly sold subsequently to Rosmah’s son (Story & Saul, 2015; The Malaysian Insider, 2013). This allusion was in Mrs Jit’s line “I bought some for my son too” (para 38).

7.3.1.3 *Linguistic humour as the dominant technique*

To understand the technique of humour used in the video Raskin’s (1985) linguistic humour theory is useful, as the jokes in this video are primarily verbal. Raskin explains that a linguistic joke has an overlap of two “scripts” with an opposite but compatible relationship. A trigger word allows the meaning to pivot from one script to another equally compatible but unexpected script. Funniness is achieved when the audience, led towards one expected resolution is suddenly redirected to the other script without warning.

Kok’s opening demonstrated this technique when she punned on the word “Malaysia”. Names and words not originally found in Chinese are often transcribed rather than translated. For example, the

name “Malaysia” is transcribed using four separate monosyllabic Mandarin words 马 (“ma”, literally “horse”), 来 (“lai” literally “come”), 西 (“si” literally “West”) and 亚 (“ya”, which can mean Asia, an ordinal – second, or a prefix to names). The individual meanings of each character are disregarded and the group of characters are read together as a compound noun “ma-lai-si-ya”, or Malaysia (马来西亚).

2014 was the Chinese zodiac year of the horse. The Chinese word for horse (马, pronounced as “ma” in both Cantonese and Mandarin) functions as Raskin’s (1985) trigger for different scripts. For example, the subset group 马来 (“ma lai”), if read as a compound name-pair could simply denote “Malay”, or it could be read as a noun-verb to literally mean “the horse is coming”.

In Kok’s opening sentence, “Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our special Chinese New Year Fortune Programme *ONEderful Malaysia!*” the original pun on *ONEderful Malaysia!*” loses the essence of the humour in the English *translation*. The humour she used in the original was complex as she employed rapid code switching back and forth between Mandarin and Cantonese, a common linguistic practice in Malaysia.

While “ma lai” was pronounced by Kok in standard Mandarin, “si-ya” was modified, with the insertion of an addition word, and read in Cantonese, resulting in the Mandarin “si-ya” (西亚)

becoming the Cantonese expression “sai lei ah” (犀利啊), which literally means “sharp”. This is an idiomatic expression roughly equivalent to the exclamation “brilliant!” in vernacular English and can be a form of praise or sarcasm, the kind of irony often accompanied by a rolling of the eyes. The word “ya” (亚) here has had 口 (“kou” literally “mouth”) added as a radical to change the primary word into an onomatopoeic spoken exclamatory particle.

In short, Kok's opening line containing the phrase "ma lai sai lei ah" (read partly in Mandarin and partly in Cantonese) created a complex ambiguity that functioned as a trigger for opposing scripts that would have been perceived, by many who understand Mandarin and Cantonese, as humorous. The entire phrase is a play on the word "Malaysia" as it could mean that the arrival of the horse ("ma lai") brings greatness or brilliance ("sai lei ah") to Malaysia. Alternatively, and an equally compatible script, is to read "Ma lai" as referring to the Malay people being described as "sai lei ah" or brilliant. This latter reading then could be taken either literally (the Malays are brilliant) or sarcastically, to mean the opposite. It is the latter possible interpretation that was problematic and likely the cause for offence for some. The backlash prompted Kok to release a video clarification on 5 February 2015, which was essentially a Malay explanation similar in effect to the preceding paragraph above. She also wrote in a post accompanying the video:

"Ma Lai" (马来) dalam Mandarin bermaksud "kuda datang"

"Tajuk klip video tersebut adalah kombinasi Mandarin dan Kantonis. "Ma Lai" (马来) dalam Mandarin bermaksud "kuda datang", "sai lei ah" (犀利啊) dalam Kantonis bermaksud "sangat hebat". Tahun Baru kali ini adalah Tahun Kuda dalam kalendar budaya Cina. Ucapan saya sebagai pengacara dalam program video tersebut langsung tidak sebut tentang orang Melayu." -- Teresa Kok, MP Seputeh

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=739276686083455&set=vb.117300344947762&type=2&theater>

In the final sentence Kok, in saying "...langsung tidak sebut tentang orang Melayu", emphasised that there was absolutely no mention of "Malay people".

Kok continues with the pun technique in para 2:

Let me tell you this Year of the Horse is really fantastic. Besides the usual Lucky Star, Unlucky Star and Quarrel Star there are also Star of Housing Price-hike, Star of petrol Price-hike, star of utilities price-hike and two very unusual stars, namely Simply-Hike Star and All prices-Hike Star as well. All these stars together form a very rare and huge year of the Horse.

The most significant play on words was the pun on the Cantonese homophones 升 (hike or rise) and 星 (star). While both are pronounced differently in Mandarin, they are both read as “sing” in Cantonese. In the context of the new year zodiac constellations, she appeared to be describing various stars (星). She started with the standard pairing of words like 吉 (luck) and 星 (star) but gradually progressed to less common groups like 屋价 (house price) 星 (star), 石油 (butane gas) 星 (star), 电水费 (electricity and water bill) 星 (star). Because the joke is verbal, the listener will detect the pivot in the word 星 switching meaning to 升 to imply a hike or rise for those items, resulting in an indirect commentary on high inflation rate experienced by the country.

The linguistic word play continues when *Feng shui* Master Yan explains that the economy is in bad shape because the Ringgit has dropped in value. The Chinese words for “Malaysia currency” is 马 幣 (“ma bi” in Mandarin or “ma bai” in Cantonese), which is homophonic with “bad horse” or “unfortunate horse” (马 弊). The lower parts of the characters 幣 and 弊 are subtly different.

You all need to wake up and listen to me! Why currency of Ringgit Malaysia slumps. Ma Bai, Ma Bai means luck also gone!

Para 9

Master Yan Yan was suggesting the Chinese name for “Malaysian currency” (“ma bi”) is portentous and that the official currency name, Ringgit, a Malay word, should be used instead: “call it Ringgit Ringgit, the sound of Ring Ring”. The pivot to the opposite script here is subtle and occurred when the second *Feng shui* expert, Mrs Jit chimed in:

“Ring, Ring, Ring, I love Ring”

Para 10

The trigger in this joke was both in “ring” as well as through the visual cue in Mrs Jit’s appearance and mannerism, which is seen by viewers as strongly resembling the Prime Minister’s wife Rosmah

Mansor who allegedly bought a RM24-million diamond ring from New York-based jeweller Jacob & Co (Boo, 2013). This allusion was reinforced in the subsequent line (paragraph 13) where a reference was made to diamonds.

The verbal play was not restricted to words but also included numbers.

M [man in audience]: In this Year of the Horse if I wish to start a business but only have limited capital, what can I do?

J: You don't have money and still want to start a business?

Together: "Sell Chinese"

T: "Sell Chinese"? How to sell?

W: If you want to "sell Chinese", first must join the society, entrance fees is RM25 only.

After that you can be a "traitor" [二五仔女]

Para 41-45

The phrase "sell Chinese" in Chinese is rendered as 卖华 ("mai hua", where "mai" means sell and "hua" is a word that represents China or Chinese). When Brother Wei suggested that people "first must join the society" he used 卖华公会 ("mai hua gong hui" literally, sell Chinese association) for "society". This puns with 马华公会 ("ma hua gong hui") the abbreviated Chinese name for the Malaysian Chinese Association, a component party in the ruling alliance, *Barisan Nasional*. The fictitious entrance fee of RM25 was chosen deliberately for the significance in the numbers 2 and 5 and cannot be linked back to the actual MCA annual membership fee, which is RM10 for a 5-year subscription or RM100 for life (Malaysian Chinese Association, n.d.). Two and five were used as a historical allusion "to an expelled Shaolin monk named 馬寧 (Ma Ning) who was of rank 2+5=7⁵⁹" (Sheik, 2003-2015). After his expulsion from the Shaolin Temple for misconduct, Ma Ning had snatched on the Ming rebels (of which Shaolin Temple was a part of) to the Qing dynasty that they

⁵⁹ Indirect references in Chinese are a common feature where, instead of saying Ma Ning the 7th level monk, he is referred euphemistically as "two five".

were trying to overthrow. The implied chain of allusion here is that the MCA, which claims to represent the Chinese community, has similarly betrayed its Chinese voters and have become a 二五仔 (“two-five” traitor).

The thematic horse 马 (“ma”) formed the basis of most of the verbal word-play, and provided a unifying thread. In this last example, a jibe was made at the Prime Minister’s wife again.

J: I’ll handle this, when we talk about relationship, let me tell you. You must place a big horse in the obvious locations, dating place, wedding hall and room. Not a golden horse, nor a wooden horse but a horse made by nails and screws

Y: Ahhh...LO SI-MA (Horse made by nails and screws)

Para 50-51

A golden horse is described as 金马 (“jin ma”), a wooden horse 木马 (“Mu ma”). When Mrs Jit suggested placing a “horse made by nails and screws” for luck that would lead the audience to the logical conclusion of a 螺丝马 “luo si ma”, or LO-SI-MA in the transcript, which puns with the name of the PM’s wife, Rosmah.

Several insights can be gathered from the analysis of the video’s properties. Firstly, the spike in both likes and shares for the video was an unambiguous departure from the norm of Kok’s video posts, indicating this video strongly resonated with the audience. The pertinent question then is to ask if the popularity was rooted in the humour or the topics she chose to highlight. Analysing the humour technique, it does not seem to be atypical, as it liberally used puns, a common enough feature in Chinese humour due to the language’s tonal character that gives rise to homophones. Furthermore, the humour does not appear very different to her other videos. What was innovative in this video, compared to the previous videos, would be its setting (which is highly appropriate for the season and occasion) and the *topoi*, which highlighted many timely issues that were of grave concern to the citizens. The *kategoria*, interestingly, was not the Prime Minister but his wife. This is significant as the wife of the Prime Minister is not an official position and carries no legal significance but, her

influence in public life, which is out of proportion to her official status, may be causing great alarm to many Malaysians, including Kok (FMT Staff, 2011).

7.3.2 Processes

The controversy stirred up by this video led to a debate in parliament and to Kok being charged with sedition in court.⁶⁰ As such, the processes that warrants a closer focus are the relationships between Kok the producer and the content of the video and that between the producer and her audience. The former will reveal some of the motivations of the producer, the thought process that went behind the production of the satirical video and the decisions behind the choice of content and form of the video. The latter will show the relation between Kok and her audience, the responses of both the target audience as well as the unintended audience.

7.3.2.1 *Producer/Content relationship*

The primary data for establishing the producer/content relationship was Kok's interview with Prasad Michael (KiniTV, 2014a). KiniTV is an Internet TV news channel that makes use of YouTube. It boasts of 243,000 subscribers and over 138 million views, making it "the most subscribed and viewed Malaysian news channel on YouTube" (KiniTV, 2013 - 2015). A transcript of the interview has been included as Appendix: KiniTV. The information derived from this interview will be cross checked against a personal interview that I conducted with Kok on 18 October 2014.

Communication purpose. Kok, a communications graduate, demonstrated sensitivity to her target audience. By clearly identifying who they are she was able to craft her message to reach them.

Actually my target audience, originally, they are the urban folks who understand Cantonese and Mandarin, and the reason I put the English subtitles, are meant for those English educated Chinese so I didn't expect now the hit...what you call that?

Para 26, Appendix: KiniTV

⁶⁰ On 20 November 2015, the AG suddenly withdrew the charge against her without explanation (Nazlina, 2015).

In order to identify with this target, she used a uniquely Malaysian urban Chinese voice, which is a mix of Cantonese, Mandarin as well as Malay words in her script. Kok claimed that the video was purely for fun, and mostly as an effort to reach out to the younger generation. She understood the role of the new media, especially to the younger generation, and pointed out the ineffectiveness of the tradition *ceramah* or political rallies. Recognising the ubiquitous presence of social media, her messages are designed to be short, pithy and easily transmittable from mobile device to mobile device.

How to reach out to the younger generation? How to do something that, you know, people will laugh and then people get the meaning? It's from political satire. I believe nowadays ah many of us always got from WhatsApp, those video clip, isn't it? Either speech, either jokes, either some meaningful thing, from the 2 minutes, 3 minutes thing circulating around.

Para 60⁶¹

Kok defended her use of humour on social media as an effective tool to reach out to new voters. Quoting statistics from the 2013 general election, where around 20 per cent of the electorates were new voters, she argued that any changes in the country's political direction can no longer depend on mature voters who "are already fixed on our, on who we want to vote or choose" (para 73, Appendix: Teresa Kok - Interview). In her opinion, the urban, university educated voters do not require more convincing and the priority is to reach out to the "grass root people". The use of satire was seen by her as an effective tool for condensing issues and transmitting information and knowledge and the accessibility of the satirical material through social media a key factor.

So it will somehow go into ah the grass root people's mind. What is important is the grass root wat. You and I come to university and all that we all know but it's the grass root coffeeshop talk where people show this and that, they all laugh you know when watching the YouTube clip eh through the WhatsApp you know to transfer. The impact is greater.

Para 73

⁶¹ All references to the TV interview are to the transcribed version in the appendix.

Despite this aim to win the hearts and minds of new voters, the goal of the outreach was generally modest. Kok quoted the viewership of her videos from previous years and emphasised what she did with her satirical video was nothing new and, as in the past, she did not expect a huge audience. The unexpected infamy was fuelled more by the mainstream media rather than social media. Malaysia is a relatively large country with huge areas still underdeveloped in the states of Sabah and Sarawak. These states, both major vote banks for the government, still do not have Internet available in their rural parts. Ironically, by highlighting Kok's video and the seditious charges brought against her, the reporting on mainstream newspapers and national television had catapulted her into the national arena. When asked whether her efforts had gone beyond her regular Chinese voters, she replied:

Ya, of course, after they make it a big issue you know, you can see wah...the viewership goes up so much. The more they whack me on TV and Utusan, and all that, the more the Malays and other races come and watch. They make me like overnight famous lah. So they make me known lah.

Para 47

Kok explained that her appearance on the government-controlled national news media allowed previously unreachable voters in the East of Malaysia to put a face to her name. This had worked out well for her mission to access an audience previously monopolised by the government.

So when I go to Sabah...it comes out so many times on TV news, ah. About me. All the protest and all that. Now I go to Sabah, go to interior area...you know, interior area they don't read newspapers, they can't access to Internet, and so on. When they say Teresa Kok they know lah [laugh]. So...you know we are trying to make headway into interior area, then my contact, you know, down there – Keningau, all that, go to kampong. When I go there they insisted I must go there. I must go there and talk to the people there because they recognise me.

Para 48

Content. In the earlier analysis of the video's properties, the *kategoria* attacks were identified as targeting the government's various policies, with just a couple of personal characteristics *kategoria*

vaguely alluding to the Prime Minister's wife and the MCA. The analysis did not identify any elements that conform to the Malaysian legal definition for sedition.⁶²

Kok described the charges against her as "the funniest sedition case in the annals of Malaysian history" (Jason Ng, 2014). Her response appears valid when the video content is analysed and the closest thing to the promotion of "feelings of ill will and hostility between different races" would likely be the ambiguity of the phrase 马来犀利啊 ("ma lai sai lei ah") where 马来 ("ma lai") could be interpreted as Malaysia, or the Malay people, and/or the 犀利啊 ("sai lei ah") read literally or ironically. It would appear this was Kok's initial fear, which was why she posted the clarification video in Malay on 5 February. Kok vehemently denies her video is racist and religiously biased, citing an anecdote involving a random Malay passer-by as defence:

OK, now, that day I passed by that Gombak area, there is one Malay, horn his car "Teresa Kok, your video clip *bagus* [good!]" So I didn't expect all this audience [laugh] so in a way they have indirectly promoted my tape to a larger audience, ah...And people can see very clearly that there is no racial and religious slur in the subtitles, you know, and in the conversation in the video clip.

Para 26

The other targets – economy, travel / security, education, protest/freedom of speech – if read according to the *ex parsimoniae* principle, violates none of these provisions. The Manhattan investment segment, as well as the "sell Chinese", and the "LO SI-MA" segments, are open to interpretation and hold the possibility of inference about certain individuals or groups but the vagueness and ambiguity prevent a conclusive direct reference from being drawn. Even if direct

⁶² Article 3 ("The Sedition Act," 1948) states:

(1) A "seditious tendency" is a tendency—
(a) to bring into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection against any Ruler or against any Government;
(b) to excite the subjects of any Ruler or the inhabitants of any territory governed by any Government to attempt to procure in the territory of the Ruler or governed by the Government, the alteration, otherwise than by lawful means, of any matter as by law established;
(c) to bring into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection against the administration of justice in Malaysia or in any State;
(d) to raise discontent or disaffection amongst the subjects of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong or of the Ruler of any State or amongst the inhabitants of Malaysia or of any State;
(e) to promote feelings of ill will and hostility between different races or classes of the population of Malaysia; or
(f) to question any matter, right, status, position, privilege, sovereignty or prerogative established or protected by the provisions of Part III of the Federal Constitution or Article 152, 153 or 181 of the Federal Constitution.

references were made to specific targets, a more reasonable legal application would be to resort to defamation or slander laws, and indeed the initial objection raised against her video was that she offended Islam and Muslims (KiniTV, 2014b; Jason Ng, 2014). However, when she was eventually charged in court, the allegations against her were changed:

...the lines cited by the prosecutors as seditious was the part where Kok poked fun at the security situation in Sabah.... They also cited part of the clip which warned people what to wear as those who wore the colour yellow could be prosecuted...Among the other parts cited were on vernacular education and Chinese people selling out the government. The charge sheet did not state how the parts highlighted were seditious or were directly related to certain incidents and quarters

(Palani, 2014).

On her choice of *topoi*, she argued that these were issues that were already heavy on the minds of the ordinary people. She argued that she was making references to coffee shops talk by ordinary folk, which hints of Habermas's classic public sphere, that is, one that is formed in actual interchange between people, rather than one that is mass-mediated.

Whereas on, on my side people just talk about...ah, ah, you know, issues faced by the nation, faced by the people, all these issues are people talk at the coffee shop. And, where they put in a lot of jokes and make fun of the issue so I would think the...whoever watch it knows this is a comedy, they should watch it in...er, they should have a sense of humour when they watch this clip.

Para 32

In fact ah, when I work with my, work on my script together with my colleague I never had the Lahad Datu incident in mind. I had a shock when Shafie Apdal said that I run down the soldiers, you know, did not appreciate their sacrifice in that Lahad Datu incidence, so it...it...it just doesn't make sense. You just try to highlight the security issue that face by the general public and also in Sabah particularly, so for the Visit Malaysia Year, how do we attract tourist to come when we do not, the government doesn't address the security issue, doesn't give assurance to the tourists, especially last year when the Taiwanese, er, lady being kidnapped for one month, and the husband being shot dead in the land of Sabah, so these are the real issues faced by, er, us. The government should admi...look at issues that we highlight

and not, you know, twist and turn the theme of the video clip and run me down in a, in a lot of unsubstantiated er, you know, accusation.

Para 36

According to Kok some of her critics have commented that she, as a Christian, ought not to have “promoted” *Feng shui*, which goes against her Christian beliefs (para.62). Kok defended the *topos* as relevant because of the seasonal, cultural practice of consulting *feng shui* masters:

As I say just now, the motive of the video is Chinese New Year coming, let’s have some fun. Ah, so that’s why we highlight the social issues, er, political issues faced by the nation and we use a, the way the *feng shui* master analyse the fortune of the year, use the way they, they, they explain the fortune and *Feng shui* to, to highlight all these issues. It’s a political satire. It’s just for people to have a laugh over it.

Para 48

Another criticism was that she should have just kept it to a simple, straightforward festive greeting. Gray, Jones & Thompson (2009) suggest that critics of satire find it difficult to see its political potential because “satire is coded as a subgenre of comedy, and comedy and humour represent for many the opposite of seriousness and rational deliberation” (p. 8). Kok’s argument was that firstly she did precisely that at the end of the video, and secondly, a mere greeting demonstrates a lack of imagination. More importantly, she saw a need to manage people’s expectations of politicians, who are seen as combative and aggressive, and present a softer, more approachable persona to the electorates in order to win over new voters:

T: Ya, at the end of my video clip we wish everybody to have a successful year, happy year, those who want to get married go to get married, those who are...ah...those are underemployed we hope, we wish them they can get their pay rise immediately...all the well...all the wishes are there.

P: But, I think, they want to know is, like usually, why not get straight to that instead of having, like pulling all like national issues...

T: That is boring!

P: [laugh]

T: As politicians, you know, people see us as always scold people in the parliament, we scold in the *ceramah*, scold *Barisan Nasional*, scold this and that. Come on, lah. Let's take away all these, ah, you know, the rigid image and face. Let's have some fun. Let people, you know, ah, look at the other side of the politician and let's have a laugh over certain things that happen in our country.

Para 50-54

The observation from this appears to be that Kok's video had breached the norm, caused uneasiness in some people who viewed her as speaking in an unparliamentarian way and that her humour was too polysemic to be useful in political communication. This sentiment echoes Day's (2011) study of parodic news shows where she noted observers' fear that such shows "forment cynicism and detachment from the political world" (p. 43).

7.3.2.2 *Producer/Audience relationship*

The next question is how her video impacts the relationship she has with the audience, who can be simply divided into her supporters and her opponents. Among her supporters, interestingly, not everyone approved of her video. By analysing the comments (Appendix: Teresa Kok - Comments), insights can be gained into the viewer's understanding of humour, satire and its use. Again, this is compared against information provided by Kok in her TV interview (Appendix: KiniTV) as well as the one-to-one interview (Appendix: Teresa Kok - Interview).

7.3.2.2.1 *Supporters who liked the video.*

Based on the likes and share statistics (Table 7.1), Kok's video was regarded favourably by the majority of her followers. It reinforced her claim that such humorous efforts mitigate the fierce and serious exterior commonly associated with politicians. There is an evident rapport between Kok and her followers, despite her higher social standing. Many commentators referred to her affectionately as YB ("*Yang Berhormat*", the Malay word for "The Right Honourable"), or just Teresa.

The positive comments were simple compliments, congratulatory or encouraging notes. (Note: all excerpts of viewers' comments, as in previous chapters, have been left unedited for the preservation of the texts' authenticity.)

Thumb up for Teresa and her team. I really enjoyed it so much... (34)

Unbelievable. Great production ! (57)

Hahahaha..... So funny... So true..(77)

A prominent reason for liking the video was its entertainment value.

My Chinese is not so good yet I found this to be humorous and entertaining. (144)

Nice video, your team not only focus on work but also entertainment to the community.

Balance of work & life.

Thanks for the true good laugh. (154)

nice one YB Teresa. once you retired from politics, you can become film director (267)

A couple of commentators demonstrated a deeper understanding of satire and its role in politics, for example, its function as cultural mirror (Koelble & Robins, 2007).

Satire and ridicule are useful tools for illuminating reality. (8)

good...really funny and reflected citizens emotion (87)

Another comment echoed Freud's (2016) theory of humour as a relief for excess psychological energy (see 2.3.1.2 Release Theory).

Many like the sarcasm in the video not just because it is funny. It is because they are so 'tense up' inside that they about to blow up. They need an 'outlet' to vent those negative feelings, if not anger. Don't u think that this is better than violence or aggression? (30)

Humour was also a coping mechanism in the midst of socio-political uncertainty.

One reason Malaysians are able to remain sane under our present difficult political environment is because of these sarcasms, allowing us to let off steam, so to speak. If we are without these outspoken politicians to check and stop these abuses, we should be dead meat by now! Keep up the good work YB Teresa Kok, thank you! (51)

This is really funny yet so insightful! We need some humour in our politics or else it will be boring (232)

Others saw the satire simply as a form of message transmission, or even propaganda:

Even though i don't understand Mandarin nor kantonis but based on subtitle in English i manage to get the clear message being delivered on the CNY 2014 clearly YB Teresa Kok, It's a Excellent job!!! (94)

Despite many criticize her video I believe this is an effective propaganda tool. It is easier to send out political message via satire scripts. Rather than using serious stuffs that usually boring and would not catch your targeted audience attention. (119)

Wow! Hope that 'somebody' get the message! (260)

There were those who were defensive and protective of Kok.

Come on, it's a joke, why are people so uptight? Why can't just have a few good laugh? It's not high school for goodness sake, loosen up a bit. (47)

...this video got nothing to do with race...its solely bout msian political scenes...we shud not raise a racial related issues at all cost nor we shud think about it. Then only we may progress well in all sectors (53)

It amazes me how some idiots can still relate harmless satire to religion and racism. But then again only they would have the time to go around on other people's videos spreading hate. Happy CNY =^^=! (54)

Anyway , my vote in seputeh still goes to her haha (133)

One commentator was especially strident in his defence of Kok's performance as an MP:

I am in YB Teresa constituency. She respond to every of my email on a rogue developer in my area. No response from MCA's Nicole and DBKL though. What's wrong with you? Can't take a joke? Go watch Saturday Night Lives maybe you will lose up a bit.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0vVKZL-Z7I (37)

7.3.2.2.2 *Supporters who didn't like the video.*

Not all who disapproved of her video were her political enemies, as far as can be told from the profiles of her followers. A couple of these commentators acknowledged the catharsis humour brings but were concerned about the propriety of this video.

This satire video is good for the suffering Rakyat, but certainly inappropriate for CNY YB.
(120)

sure i understand. I don't think this video is appropriate. (302)

A few commentators saw this as a waste of time that could be better used to solve issues in a practical way. Kok's satire was perceived to be a distraction from her primary work, or a misuse of her resources.

Sarcasm might be entertaining but it doesn't solve our national problems. We want to see politicians from both sides coming up with constructive solutions. Please stop wasting time in producing these videos. Since Pakatan (DAP included) is running the Selangor government, please help us to reduce crimes in this state. (4)

Come on Teresa, don't waste ur time in producing this stupid video. U've been a MP for few terms, what have u done for the rakyat? ZERO..... Don't be like LGE, say one thing but do another. Pls. mirror ur own self. (33)

there are more impptant things to do than this. (59)

Don't you have other better things to do as a Parliamentarian? Why don't you focus on constructive policy rather than making jokes of others in a Celebrative occasion? (121)

A unique concern was the fear of the negative impression the video gives to non-Malaysians. The use of satire was likened to being “destructive” and “evil”.

I personally don't find this funny and frankly speaking a number of my friends have a lot of doubts in visiting Malaysia after watching this.

It is easy to go destructive when you want to win a war, but that makes you no different from the very same evil you are fighting. (24)

Another commentator was of the view that Malaysians, already inundated with bad news all the time, do not need another reminder. Several saw the satirical video as adding to the tension, not relieving it, by polarising society.

We all hear these things everyday.

Since funny doesn't equal to constructive, why not give Malaysians a break and ease the tension for a while?

No need to create such video. A sincere CNY greeting without propaganda will do.

Salam Malaysia Masih Aman. (26)

R U a learned YB or otherwise? Such videos does not solve anything but only worsened existing tension. Why waste time and hard earned money of the rayats. I admired U when U first appeared in Malaysian politics. But now it seemed U are no better than some evil politicians you're fighting. Cheap n low down publicity. (43)

The fact that they only put English subtitle means it is only intended to make this video available mainly to non Malay only. This will only make our society even more polarized and give an excuse for BN to say DAP means for non Malay mainly Chinese only. (31)

There were those who saw the satire as undignified and its use unbecoming for a Member of Parliament. This underscores some expectations voters have for their representatives and also perhaps reflects their feeling and belief that issues like those in the video should be addressed through proper channels. This in turn reveals their understanding (or lack) of the political mechanism and reality in Malaysia. One commentator betrayed his ignorance about the use of satire in “mature democratic countries” in the West, for instance President Obama.⁶³

How lowly DAP and PR politicians have stooped!! And small wonder! I strongly suggest to the likes of Teresa Kok, to truly and conscientiously spend time to focus on and scrutinize the

⁶³ See “President Obama at the 2015 White House” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMol4KdcyJ0>

weaknesses and failures in yr own governance, if you are serious abt building a better Malaysia (35)

I don't agree. By now the opposition should go on to next level discuss / debate about policies and not to ridicule others. I don't think politicians in mature democratic countries like US and UK or even the Australian will do such thing. (31)

The Pen is mightier than the Sword. Your Vote counts! Get your Parliamentarian to address issues that are detrimental to the Country. Address problems, discrimination... corruption etc. Their job is to represent our needs. What is their mandate? When they ask for our vote did they not promise to address.. rectify our demands.

They have the right to propose, plan, discuss, amend legislation that is fair and beneficial to all and benefit all Malaysians irregardless of race, religion...

If members in the Dewan Raakyat don't bring up issues and resolve problems through Legislation than change won't happen!

Complaining to your family, friends, colleagues or media is a waste of time. (157)

Kok argued that acting in a satirical video is no more unbecoming than other forms of rhetoric, citing the Prime Minister's impassioned speeches in Parliament and in his party's General Assemblies, where he drums up support for himself.

For me it's like, I don't see myself as so high up that I can't act... ah, the MCA, ah there's one MCA [not clear] say that I lower my status by playing the acting role. So what? Najib, this parliament sitting, budget time... wah, full of, you know, all that, he doesn't need to read, you know? Doesn't need to conventional style reading. Why? There are two reflection thing ah, he can just... ah, prompter?... Ah, prompter. His hand can move, like so, full of expression. UMNO assembly time, wah, so dramatic some more, before and after the general election. You can see how UMNO you should be united... so I was looking at him. Isn't he acting ah? You know he can talk until some of the UMNO wanita members want to cry at down there. For me, wah, your acting very well ah. Right or not? When you say acting? Everybody is acting.

Para 65, Appendix: Teresa Kok - Interview

Kok briefly interacted with her followers at the beginning of the comments section (no.2 and 5, Appendix: Comment) when she was criticised for not tackling the problem of rising crime in the

Opposition governed state of Selangor. She responded that the police are not under state government control. After that brief appearance, she dropped out of the thread. In the one-to-one interview, she was asked if she read the comments.

I do but there are times because most of the time I read from my iPad...from my iPad sometimes it will *PONG* go off wan you know? Then you will have to press and download again. Because I'm always on the move, so I always carry my iPad along, so I buy a big handbag, so my iPad can throw inside. So when I'm waiting for meal to serve me I check my iPad. When I'm in my car going to somewhere I check my iPad. So I do read lah, lots of the comments I do read la.

Para 12, Appendix: Interview

It is also interesting that Kok made use of Facebook comments to keep her finger on the pulse of her constituency. To her, the grassroots or the ordinary people are priority. She acknowledged that people do scold her but it provides useful feedback.

...you ask me whether I read. I read. But sometimes when there are just too many, when it comes to thousand comments ah, I find it difficult to, go to the latest and all that because it's just too much. I do read because from there you know lah. People will scold you. Ah, there are people who bring up other things, then you know the trend of thought of people, you know. So there are things ah, like...me in politics we think in that way. Sometimes the ground, you find that there are certain things that are so controversial like go to Oktoberfest. You'll be shocked to read some of the Malays ah, their comments you know. But this is a feedback to me. You can see how racist some of our Chinese Facebookers are. I mean all these are something for me to learn about, you know, the reaction of the public, especially the young.

Para 65, Appendix: Teresa Kok - Interview

She argued that the opposition to her video among her supporters was simply because it became controversial. Kok contended that similar satirical videos in the past did not invite such criticisms; it appears that the criterion for deciding if a video is proper or improper depends on whether it is controversial, rather than because the content is inherently objectionable "Objectionable" is socially constructed and dependent on culture and context and in Malaysia sexual topics or even sensitive

religious comments are considered taboo in public regardless how they are framed. Kok is arguing that political satire and parody are not, in normal circumstances, objectionable material, as she and others have posted similar satirical videos in the past without negative reactions.

Actually, they are...I must tell you that there are people who think it is really improper because it becomes a controversy, so it is improper lah.

Para 62, Appendix Interview

Her argument is reasonable because a highly public humour video would be seen as more damaging than a less public one, even when the contents are the same. However, it also needs to be acknowledged that perhaps fewer people would have come across the videos of the past as they were less publicised. A quick check of Kok's 2013 Chinese New Year video (Kok, 2013) on her Facebook video page bears out her argument. A total of 244 comments were posted by her followers and there was not a single criticism of that video.

Political opponents. Kok was firm in her belief that satire in itself is not problematic. Instead, her problems arose due to the manner in which her political opponents twisted or misinterpreted her video. She opined that the Malaysian audience is sophisticated and ready to accept satire and humour. However, her opponents found her satire a convenient opportunity to misdirect attention from pressing national issues.

I think they are all ready. You see some of the comedians, we have to spend thousands of ringgit to invite them to give a performance of one hour or half an hour. People enjoy they imitate politicians, people enjoy they poke fun on the political issues but people are ready, the problem now is that...er...they are...some politicians not happy and they want to use...they are looking for issues to divert attention from the reali...political reality, issues faced by the nation and also faced by UMNO internally. They try to look for issues, look for enemies, look for target to divert attention of the Malay ground towards this issue so that they forget about real issues that faced by the party, faced by *Barisan Nasional*, and faced by the nation.

Para 44, Appendix: Teresa Kok - Interview

Otherwise, my whole video clip...nothing to do with Melayu, nothing to do with Islam, nothing to do with the royal family, royalty, why you target me? Sure be MCA that jumps.

MCA when the video clip came out nobody dared to say anything. So it has to do with the fat lady in the video clip that make those people surround her hoo ha lah.

Para 27, Appendix: Teresa Kok - Interview

There is merit in her argument, as the analysis of the content of her video did not match the criteria for sedition. For example, the emotive allegation that the video was offensive to Islam and Muslims was completely without foundation in the video's contents but that did not prevent BN MP for Lenggong from raising it in parliament (KiniTV, 2014b). In Kok's opinion, such allegations are intentionally framed for political mileage and it was her rather than her satire that was the real target. She similarly identified other younger opposition leaders as targets.

So the people who want to attack us, those who want to defame us. You look at *Utusan Malaysia*, and all that, they are the one, for me *cari pasal* [looking for trouble]. Even when I was in Selangor, when I was an Exco, they go after me; they don't go after Kit Siang. You notice they don't go after Kit Siang, why you think they don't go after Kit Siang, they go after Lim Guan Eng, after me then Tony Pua. Like I'd been put under ISA. Charged under sedition. So they are like targeting certain people to be enemies of Islam and Malays. We are the extremist. So we have been...unfortunately I'm one of those. I fall into their trap. Or target lah. I become their target.

Para 19

7.4 Discussion and conclusions

Teresa Kok's foray into the discourse of entertainment has further blurred the distinction between politics, journalism and entertainment. While this has earned her some rebuke from those who perceive this as dangerous, it can also be seen as an innovative rethinking of how politics are communicated. Some major ideas can be drawn from this case study.

7.4.1 Kok's satirical video: a new way of conducting politics?

The use of humour and satire by Kok is effective as it is well received by her target audience. In addition to providing comic relief to Malaysians weary of the political wrangling it also helped Kok to connect and reach out to her voters. Malaysians in general appear to be tolerant, at the least, if not

accepting towards political satire. The sedition laws, while broad, still provide adequately demarcated boundaries for the satirist to remain within. However, this did not prevent the abuse of the legal processes by politically motivated parties to intimidate and harass the critical satirist. This has a chilling effect on the freedom of speech in Malaysia. If Kok, as an MP, is charged, for a satirical work, many more serious things can no longer be said. The strong reaction to the video belies the benign nature of the satire. Although Kok had posted similar satirical videos before they were never as heavily criticised. The controversy stirred up by this video even led to a debate in parliament and ultimately to Kok being charged with sedition in court. There could be several factors that marked this video differently. One possibility is its reference to powerful individuals with resources at hand to take action against her. Also, while brickbats from political enemies were fully expected, the attack from her own camp was curious as supporters publicly criticising their leaders are seen as disloyal in a culture of hierarchical relationships often framed as “you are either with me or against me” and is highly unusual in the Malaysian context. Among the reasons identified is the concern with impropriety as Kok’s satirical activities are seen as polarising society, undignified and its use unbecoming of an MP. It was viewed as a waste of time and a distraction from her primary work, or a misuse of her resources. The expectation of an MP appears to be as a problem solver in a practical way. Maintaining face is a prominent characteristic of Asian culture and the fear of giving a negative impression about the country to non-Malaysians is very much in line with the idea of not washing dirty linen in public. The use of satire being described as “destructive” and “evil” also presents an interesting perception about humour in general among some Malaysians. It would appear the critics from Kok’s own camp employed a tautological criterion for deciding if a video is proper or improper depended on whether it is controversial or not, rather than because the content had objectionable material that fits generally accepted notions of taboo in Malaysia society. The fact that similar satirical videos posted in the past did not invite such criticisms strengthen the argument that the videos were not inherently objectionable. This is likely what Mittell (2004) meant when he observed that “we need to ask what a genre means for specific groups in a particular cultural instance” (p. 5). Kok’s video, significantly, exposes an underlying anxiety, maybe even fear, as the cause of their discomfort with political humour although they are unlikely to object as long as no trouble is caused.

The anxiety Kok's video has caused both to her political nemeses and her own followers may be well justified. Her declared intention of doing this for "pure fun" positions her in a slippery humorous space that makes it difficult to hold her politically accountable. By her own admission, the videos had other purposes, including as an outreach tool to new and younger voters, as well as to disseminate information from the opposition's perspective. As discussed in an earlier section (see 2.3.2.3 Literary Satire) the very nature of satire has an inherent rhetorical purpose where the author has set out with the intention to make a point so the claim that it is "pure fun" is disingenuous. The fact that she was charged with the blunt Sedition Act⁶⁴ rather than libel or slander is also telling, as it indicates that the government has no real legal recourse to rein her in. The fact that the charges were dropped without explanation in November 2015 further lends credence to the inference that satire, when negotiated carefully, cannot be legally challenged in a truly democratic system. This shares similarities with early modern satirists who, according to 't Hart (2007, p. 5), escaped repression when they avoided explicit references to the object of their wit, even though the butt was often unmistakable to the public at large.

7.4.2 Beyond the limited public spheres of Facebook and YouTube

It has been well established earlier (see 2.3.3 Online political humour) that multiple Habermasian public spheres, including digital ones, (1999), contribute to a vibrant and dynamic political discourse essential for a functional democracy. Kok makes good use of Facebook as her mini public sphere and monitors comments to keep her finger on the pulse of her constituency. By posting updates of socially and politically interesting items she keeps in touch with her supporters. Her videos draw in unique online visitors, who are then given the opportunity to interact with her, thereby extending her online presence. Her use of the uniquely Malaysian urban Chinese voice—a mix of Cantonese, Mandarin as well as Malay words in her script—squares well with this demographic and there is evidence it has some reach to the younger media-savvy generation, who are important change agents, whereas mature

⁶⁴ The Sedition Act was introduced by British to combat the communist insurgency in Malaya. It is widely criticised for its misuse to silence government critics (Pak, 2014b).

voters who “are already fixed on...who we want to vote or choose” cannot be depended upon to effect change. However, humour as an information transmitter may not be as efficient as commonly perceived as the inherent ambiguity in humour might obscure the intended message, as is obvious in the number of misunderstandings the video has created. This may lead some of her critics to point out that she may be simply poking fun without saying anything of significance, which on the surface is true. However, while the literal message may be often obscured the evidence from this and the *kangkung* case study shows that the subtext has a cumulative effect and in the longer run a generic message does get across. Beyond Facebook and YouTube her satire has also extended her reach. Stepping out from her role as parliamentarian into a temporary one as a comedian/entertainer resulted in Kok appearing on the government-controlled national news, which allowed previously unreachable voters in East Malaysia to put a face to her name. This is significant as she gained access to an audience previously monopolised by the government-controlled media.

7.4.3 The emergence of a dialectical relationship

Kok’s decision to occupy an alternative communication venue in addition to parliament is important. Not only does her multi-modal performance extend the public sphere, it also sets up a dialectical relationship between the entertainment and the political domain. The media environment today is described by Baym (2005) as “an emerging media environment defined by the forces of technological multiplication, economic consolidation, and discursive integration, a landscape in which ‘real’ news is becoming increasingly harder to identify or define” (p. 259). Kok’s argument that political rhetoric is nothing new and is just another form of acting in order to persuade has some merit and her incursion into an entertainment platform is indeed an extension of this rhetoric. However, due to the murkiness of this newly emerging media environment where the boundary between real and fake is blurred, her so-called fake *feng shui* talk show, a genre that is taken seriously by adherents to *feng shui*, may in the midst of the laughter find some purchase and be taken as real, at least in essence if not literally.

In classic Hegelian⁶⁵ dialectics the thesis and the antithesis will interact to form a synthesis that integrates the best from both arguments. Kok's comedy forms an antithesis to the government's serious narrative, although Popper (1940) cautioned that this isn't always necessarily so and the thesis and antithesis could cancel each other out or a protracted tussle could ensue. In Kok's case, the legal trial represents the continued testing and development of the thesis against the antithesis of her comedy. Regardless of the outcome of the sedition trial (the charge was suddenly withdrawn by the Attorney-General's chamber without explanation a year later) her controversial satirical video will continue to challenge the vulnerabilities of the official narrative of the government. The entire process, post satirical video, will evolve as a significant "new political moment" (Jones, et al., 2012, p. 39). Gray, Jones & Thompson's (2009) description of how satire can "energise civic culture, engaging citizen-audiences...inspiring public political discussion and drawing citizens enthusiastically into the realm of the political with deft and dazzling ease" (p. 4) fits Kok's use of humour.

⁶⁵ It is not the intention of this thesis to debate Hegelian dialectics and the many development and reformulation of his theory but to situate the overall communicationve ecosystem around Kok within an acknowledged classical concept.

7.4.4 Consequence & Character

In identifying the consequences of Kok's decisions and actions in relation to the video, some tentative conclusions can be drawn regarding the character of her use of humour.

7.4.4.1 *Use of humour*

At first look, her decision to use humour as part of her outreach to new voters appears as a poor one due to the controversy it has generated. But as Kok insisted, humour had been used before with no negative consequences and the *ONEderful* video was by no means the first political satire produced by her. If her claims that previous satirical videos, due to their ease of access and transmission via mobile devices, contributed to the increase in new voters in the last couple of general elections, there is good ground to view the character of political satire as positive in relation to Kok's goal. The approval of her followers and their positive comments also indicate her success in demystifying the parliamentary persona, which is more often than not associated with aggression and conflict. The humour also acted as a cultural mirror of society and brought solace and relief to a segment of the population who were experiencing low morale. The use of word-play in the vernacular made her video highly accessible to her target audience, which is the urban Chinese speaking young voter.

Kok claimed that the controversy arose not from the humour per se but from her *kategoria* attack at certain powerful individuals who are able to exert influence on the legal mechanism. She claimed that the attacks were against her because she is firstly, an opposition politician, then a woman and lastly a Christian; these factors, rather than her satire, were the main reasons she drew flak. However, her attacking humour did provide fodder to her opponents to manufacture a controversy, even though there was none in existence to begin with. This opens the satirist, in an environment like Malaysia, to hardship.

7.4.4.2 *Controversy*

From the close analysis of the humour use in Kok's video, it is difficult to see how her content meet the legal requirements for being seditious. This, nevertheless, did not prevent her opponents from accusing her of insulting Islam and Muslims. Such attacks have the effect of creating fear and anger,

resulting in much damage to the target audience, even if the accusations are not well founded. Kok found herself in a defensive position, bearing the onus to prove that her video is not seditious. In contrast, her accusers did not even try to prove that the video is seditious. The consequence can be dire, because if the charge had been pushed through, Kok faced the possibility of imprisonment. In addition, it appears to have increased anxiety among her followers. Compared to previous political satire videos, where the praises based on Comments were unanimous, suddenly, after the controversy, some of her supporters turned around and labelled her effort as a waste of time, low class and unbecoming for a parliamentarian.

Ironically, the controversy worked in Kok's favour at the same time. As an opposition leader, she has limited access to the mainstream media, which is still an important communication channel, especially to the rural areas where large numbers of voters reside. The branding of her video as seditious has clearly drawn a lot of attention both to her video and to herself. Her Facebook viewership increased 17-fold. In addition, her appearance on the national television news channels and newspapers resulted in her becoming recognisable when she ventured into new grounds in the rural parts of East Malaysia. This has aided her effort to make inroads to new campaign grounds.

That's why there is great injustice. I can only say that in other words, they also make me more well-known lor. They accuse me for undermining the soldiers in Lahad Datu. I run them down...blah blah blah, stupid thing. Nothing to do with that, right? So most Sabahan go to watch [laugh]. So when I go to Sabah...it comes out so many times on TV news, ah. About me. All the protest and all that. Now I go to Sabah, go to interior area...you know, interior area they don't read newspapers, they can't access to Internet, and so on. When they say Teresa Kok they know lah [laugh]. So...you know we are trying to make headway into interior area, then my contact, you know, down there – Keningau, all that, go to kampong. When I go there they insisted I must go there. I must go there and talk to the people there because they recognise me.

No, because in interior area, they still able to watch TV, see. Like, I tell you two months ago I went to Belaga, Sarawak...SOOO ulu aiyo. I stay in hotel there. For us it's budget hotel. Even cheaper than budget hotel type lah. That's the only hotel you can get. There I look at the TV then I pressed the button there, can you imagine, I can only watch TV1, RTM 1 and 2. Even that, also quite blur. TV3 can't watch at all. So you want people in Belaga to know me, as

long as I appear in RTM 1 & 2 news, they know lah. They know that there is one person named Teresa Kok lah. So when...ah, so I can only say that like in parliament I whack the BN side, I say, the only...all your false accusation, you are making me more known when I go to Sabah. And then after that they ban me from entering Sabah and Sarawak.

Para 48, 50, Appendix: Teresa Kok - Interview

8 Final conclusion

This final chapter gathers together the findings of the four case studies that were, hitherto viewed discretely and in series. Now they will be evaluated on a macro level to build a collective picture of why humour is used in conveying political sentiments and how this is done through social media and the Internet in Malaysia and Singapore. The main findings of the various case studies are reviewed with the research questions in mind: why do citizens use satire and how does it contribute to civic discourse? This ought to lead to a better assessment of the consequences that arise from the use of citizen satire and a more reasonable evaluation of its character in relation to the communication of dissent. From this the significance of the research can be identified. Some suggestions for further research will be recommended.

8.1 Restatement of research

The close relationship of Malaysia and Singapore has made their pairing for study common in various disciplines of research although the rationale this study has adopted is distinctive. Many such studies tend to compare the two countries in order to use one as a predictor of the other in terms of policy adoption. In this thesis, the two countries were viewed as translocal across multiple ethnographic sites that form a single extended context for citizen satire in that region. The main commonality shared by the citizens of both “hybrid democracies” is their shared cultural and political roots, and particularly the unique challenge they face in circumventing restrictions on the expression of their opinions under regimes that are open in many facets of publicness and yet highly controlled in others, particularly in mass communication.

Focus was given to understanding how the tradition of using visual political humour is inflected in digital media and how it impacts the relations between humour and political power. Far from being frivolous, this thesis argues that humour in the form of “silly citizenship”(Hartley, 2010) is a legitimate form of engagement in civic discourse. The Internet with its Web 2.0 capabilities has widened citizens’ options in terms of accessing alternative narratives about their socio-political environments, as well as affording them new channels to express their new perspectives. In this new social mediascape traditional restrictions are circumvented, and more citizens appear increasingly motivated to share, comment and participate in social media activities. How this occurs has been a primary focus of this study. How the two governments react has similarly been of great interest.

Each of the cases studied was treated as a discrete unit, as they were selected as purposive samples that align with case study logic and with the line of enquiry of this study as framed by the research question (see 1.2.1). However, the case studies were in turn considered as parts of a larger collection that makes an integrated whole to make conclusions across the cases possible. The temptation of adopting a simplistic dichotomy for viewing the impact of citizen satire as good or bad (à la the classic Habermasian democracy as a yardstick) had to be resisted. Instead, it was necessary to recognise that citizen satire occupies a messy space that is both beneficial and damaging. One notable example of this is the way it may or may not disrupt power.

8.2 The main findings

8.2.1 Case Study One: Burgeoning citizen satire and Singapore’s SMRT

As Chapter 4 argued, the first case study of SMRT’s major breakdown signalled a crucial moment in terms of Singapore’s political landscape as well as its mediascape. The tiny city state, long known for its efficiency, where “everything works”, saw the first of many cracks on its socio-political veneer when the hitherto reliable mass transit trains started breaking down with unprecedented regularity. Public confidence was shaken and the Web 2.0 technology provided a means for the politically inexpressive citizens to air their unhappiness in public. What marked this media event as different and important for study is the uncommon participation of unrelated individuals spontaneously employing

visual humour memes created using online tools to share on Facebook (and other social media) and make fun of the situation. Four major findings have been made from this case:

1.1.1.1 Validation of dissenting views.

It is easy for those from open societies to underestimate the fear experienced by a citizenry of a restricted society to even voice their disagreement. The train breakdowns marked a turning point when a “business as usual” outlook was no longer an option for Singaporeans because a very core service in their daily lives has been affected. The hesitancy and tentativeness of citizens to respond are evidenced by the anonymity of the memes circulated. The virality of the memes were likely a surprise to many and it had the effect of making their protest less confrontational and more socially acceptable, as it was all done in good humour.

1.1.1.2 Citizen’s satire highlighted the incongruities in Singapore.

The humour mirrored the traditional court jester by reflecting reality in Singapore (see 2.3.2.1) to expose the incongruities of society, for example, a well-intentioned act (of breaking a window for ventilation, for instance) being deemed as an unsociable or even criminal act. It is a widely shared social norm to express great pride that Singapore, despite being a very young nation, has achieved superiority in many areas (for example, economics and education) that outshines many more established and technologically advanced countries. The humour was able to show up its weaknesses without taking away the positives that Singaporeans are proud of. The memes acted as what Davies (2007) called a socio-political “thermometer” (that gives an indication to the state of a situation, as opposed to a “thermostat”, which regulates it) and they have provided Singaporean a means to assess the health of their socio-political environment more empirically.

1.1.1.3 Private opinions surfacing in public.

Citizen satire facilitated a social function of creating solidarity and a shared experience when misgivings previously held privately by individuals are suddenly common and out in the open. And because the memes are visual and not limited by any language barrier the reach went beyond the limited circles that other forms of social media, like Twitter and blogs, are subject to. This may also

explain why they were picked up by the mainstream media as well. This has the effect of appealing to what Lipsky (1968) called the “referenced public” and adds leverage to those protesting. Those in authority can easily ignore the ramblings of scattered individuals, but when these complaints are aggregated and highlighted in the mainstream media, ignoring them may bring about greater consequences.

1.1.1.4 Citizen’s satire has power to effect change.

Despite the lack of coordination, the aggregated sentiment was sufficiently focused to make a point that captured the attention of the mainstream media as well as those in power. Tsakona and Popa’s (2011) assertion that humour is a tool of subversion capable of challenging political leaders and effect political changes appears to find purchase in this case study, although this needs to be viewed as a smaller part of a larger context that involves other social media tools. The resignation of the CEO was in all likelihood a surprise to Singaporeans unaccustomed to seeing a public figure being held accountable and relenting to social pressure. While it may be argued that the reason for her resignation may also be due to other sources of pressure, the popularity of the citizen satire, as well as its repetition, will reinforce the perception that it was due to the online mocking, which in turn gives the perception itself a degree of power. This aligns with Austin’s (2013) notion of performativity, whereby the utterance (or in this case the visual representation) defines and constructs the reality of being.

8.2.2 Case Study Two: SGAG and the 6.9 million population White Paper

The SMRT case was studied opportunistically and raised questions that I then wanted to look more closely at in systematic detail. This was the rationale for focusing on one particular site, SGAG, as it built on the previous media event. I posit that the resignation of SMRT’s CEO and the endorsement of the citizen generated memes by the mainstream media have emboldened at least the members of SGAG, if not more Singaporeans, to participate in activities of a political nature. This adds some degree of evidence that the familiar climate of fear of open political expression is diminishing. In this instance, expression of their frustration was done vicariously through a popular socio-political humour

page, SGAG. By this time, SMRT appears to have become symbolic of the systemic failure some Singaporeans see in their country and was beginning to act as a focal point for SGAG’s viewers and possibly as a scapegoat as well, for opposing the Singapore government’s proposed White Paper that anticipates the population reaching 6.9 million.

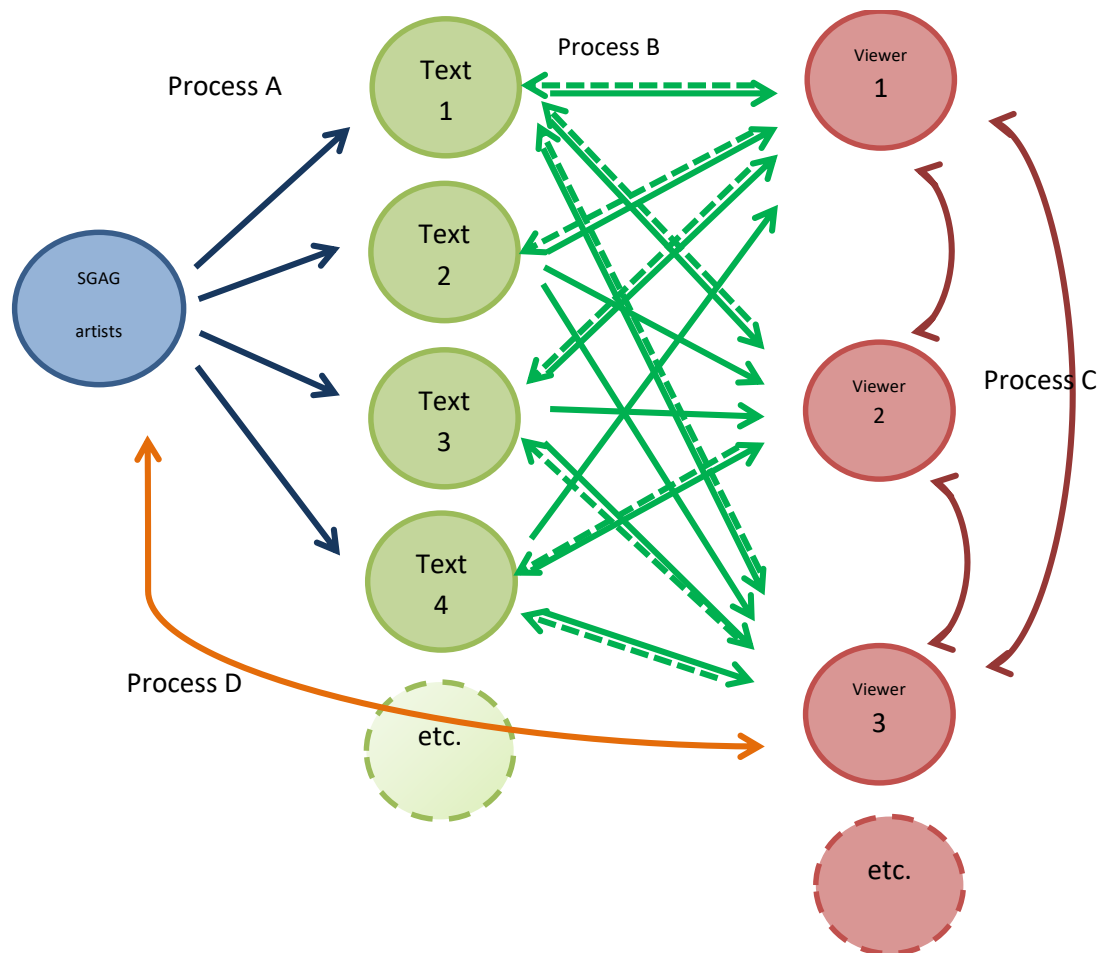


Figure 8.1: Conceptualisation of the findings

1.1.1.5 Compass points

Anderson’s (2012) media compass provided a framework upon which a more systematic analysis was built for this chapter. It pointed the analysis to four directions of investigation: properties, processes, consequences and character. The properties of this media event, by way of the frequency of likes, shares and comments, underlined the significance and popularity of the memes within the context of the White Paper proposal. The four major processes identified were notably non-linear in most of

their direction flow. Figure 8.1 visually represents the conceptualised processes where SGAG's artists produce their memes (Process A), which is then presented to the viewers, some of whom respond to the memes by commenting or suggesting improvements (Process B). Process C illustrates the interaction of the viewers among themselves in relation to the SGAG memes and occasionally Process D occurs when viewers directly engage with the SGAG artists to give positive or negative feedback.

1.1.1.1.1 Rhetorical intention: making a point

Underpinning this case study is the research question why SGAG produces memes on socio-political issues. It was established, in Process A, that one of SGAG's primary objective is to educate its audience on topics of public interest. (This, of course, does not rule out other possible objectives, like gaining traffic for financial gains, popularity, etc.) The key to SGAG's success was its ability to capture hot topics in a timely manner and to make them relevant through the visual memes. Some memes attempted to engage the audience at a more logical level but the basic analysis suggests these did not resonate as well as the memes that tapped into emotional triggers. The "less is more" approach of SGAG's memes sometimes rob them of some control over the discourse generated in their comments forum, for example in the conversation that escalated into some strong xenophobic rants. On the whole, SGAG was more focused on the government's policies and only on occasion did they obliquely attack the character of political actors. And when that does happen, the representation was generally respectful and good-natured, which harmonises with the general Singapore culture of not boldly and baldly challenging those in authority. The overall analysis of the memes revealed some limitations in the method, as deeper insight into how the rhetoric was constructed was not achieved. This realisation provided the rationale for further exploration of the Process A with memes by using tools of analysis that are more sensitive. The next case study on Najib's *kangkung* memes was planned with this purpose in mind.

1.1.1.1.2 Humour as a shared experience

There was evidence that sharing in SGAG's humour provided a sense of validation and solidarity among members to feel and be a part of the SGAG online community. The overall good-humoured banter created a collegial atmosphere, although relatively gentle ribbing of one another was used to

regulate socially accepted behaviour and to reinforce dominant viewpoints. The harshest comments were directed at the government.

1.1.1.1.3 Rude but civil

A departure from good-humoured discussions occurred when the conversation descended to a contest of behaviour and knowledge, and the effort to achieve credibility in terms of being educated. This was notable in debates over factual points. A distinction was between rude and uncivil comments, as the two have been shown (see 5.3.3 Conclusion) not to be synonymous; rude comments, while intending to hurt, do not deprive the opposing party from stating their defence, whereas in an uncivil exchange opposing views are often blocked.

1.1.1.1.4 Top-down communication

Despite the promise of a more democratic process being made available through the interactive features of their Facebook page, SGAG's mode of communication was mostly top-down, and while comments by viewers were monitored and valid suggestions incorporated into later memes only on rare occasions did SGAG and its viewers interact directly. With the exception of the direction of debate in the comments section, SGAG has a firm hold on most of the processes within their satirical page.

1.1.1.1.5 Consequences and character

The ease of passage of the White Paper in Parliament is a good indication that the memes had limited direct impact on the government's policies. However, taken in the long run, its contribution to influencing socio-political environment, however minor, cannot be disregarded, as it was evident that the memes generated much interest and debate in the issue that culminated in a physical protest at Hong Lim Park. The government was also forced to clarify or modify certain terms in the White Paper to assuage fears among some Singaporeans. At the very least, the memes rejuvenated the conversation started in the SMRT case. On its own the memes played a more limited role in effecting change. This echoes Davies' (2007) argument that there is a lack of evidence at a macro-level that

jokes boosts the oppressed and undermines the oppressor is. Instead, this case study lends support to his position that jokes are a weak social force that serves more as a safety valves of the oppressed.

8.2.3 Case Study Three: PM Najib's rhetoric and his *kangkung* gaffe

The search for an analytical tool that is better suited to uncover the deeper processes involved in the construction of a persuasive political communications led me to the mature body of research on political rhetoric in visual form. The many parallels between digital visual memes and political cartoons suggest that digital political memes may be a remediated form of political cartoons.

Aristotle's syllogism, made up of a major and minor premise, and a conclusion, can be found in well-constructed memes. *Enthymemes*, particularly those of the third order, are especially useful in directing viewers to a predetermined conclusion. The concept of *bathos* was also useful for explaining the mockery Prime Minister Najib's faux pas invited. The memes under study drew from *topoi* similarly to political cartoons: political commonplaces, cultural allusions, personal character traits and idiosyncratic and transient themes. Forms of disposition (contrast, commentary, contradiction) used by graphic rhetors as well as classical stases (*coniectura*, *definitiva*, *generalis* or *qualitas* and *translatio*) were all used to identify the memes that challenged the Prime Minister's reasoning. The notions of *kategoria* and *apologia* were used to identify the targets of the memes.

This case study captured a sequence of memes that, when analysed closely, revealed an exchange that is far from random, as it first appears, but instead had a very logical organisation behind them. The memes curated by *Curi-curi Wang Malaysia* (CCWM) were either created or selected carefully as a retort to the Prime Minister's speech. Again, like the court jester of yesteryears, the memes veiled its attack in humour. Each meme employed Aristotle's syllogism (particularly the third order enthymeme), formal dispositions and classical stases to engage the viewer's reasoning and direct them to reject the Prime Minister's argument. In terms of *kategoria*, the focus was on the government's policies whilst *ad hominem* attacks were relatively infrequent, which indicates deliberate and meaningful contributions to the public discourse. The memes avoided disputing the *coniectura*, or

factualness, of the Prime Minister's argument. Instead they focused on the highly subjective *definitiva* and *qualitas* aspects of his arguments. The *bathos* that the Prime Minister created for himself did not help his cause and further eroded his credibility. Overall, the power of visual rhetoric is apparent in the way it draws the attention of the audience and subtly leads them to a predetermined conclusion, while the use of humour has the ability to disarm those who would normally be more critical, as everything is all done in the name of good fun, which puts pressure on those who try to take things seriously not to be taunted as spoil-sports or killjoys.

8.2.4 Case Study Four: Teresa Kok – a politician playing the fool

This final case study expands the scope of this study to include a satirical video meme. The significance of this case study lies in the fact that the producer is both a citizen as well as an elected member of parliament in Malaysia. Her venture into the discourse of entertainment raises questions as it has a destabilising effect. Why did she use satire to make herself heard when an established platform like the parliament was available to her? Was the video “just for fun” as she claimed? Was it a waste of time, as her critics described it?

1.1.1.6 Why use satire?

As the video is a different medium to the static Internet memes, the media compass was applied *in toto* (in contrast to the *kangkung* case study, which focused on Process A). The examination of the video's properties showed nothing one would not find in political cartoons, i.e. in terms of the *topoi* she drew from or the humour techniques (which was predominantly the use of word play). More interesting is the processes by which the video was conceived. The entertaining nature of the video belies Kok's intentional communicative purpose to inform and persuade her target audience. The vernacular used in the video by design to attract urban new voters. The incorporation of current affairs into the satirical talk show condensed important national issues into short transmittable units that facilitated easy dissemination through mobile devices. Controversy ensured virality.

Kategoria focused on many government policies could be raised and addressed in parliament but *kategoria* against personalities required a different platform, as these will not be allowed in parliament. By targeting these persons, she lends credence to rumours surrounding them as she is an esteemed member of parliament.

1.1.1.7 Was it “just for fun”?

Kok’s breach of the norm by dabbling in what is commonly perceived as trivial caused uneasiness even among her supporters, some of whom viewed her behaviour as lacking the decorum befitting a parliamentarian. Humour was too polysemic for them to be useful as political communication. Some commentators hold an idea that humour is destructive and evil and has no place in Malaysian politics. However, judging from the comments on the video a majority of her followers enjoyed her humour. More importantly, satire is to her more than just for fun but an equally valid form of rhetoric no different to the Prime Minister’s impassioned speeches in parliament or at his party’s general assembly. Lockyer (2006, pp. 776-777) had argued that satire “enables stories that cannot be supported by factual evidence” and allows for the debate and development of contentious subjects. The use of satire clearly excused Kok from the usual standards expected of a parliamentarian or of a journalist and this was evidenced by the lack of recourse the government had to take legal action against her. Even the use of the Sedition Act failed, as it is very hard to stop people’s mockery without resorting to undemocratic means.

1.1.1.8 Was it a waste of time?

On the surface Kok’s video may appear frivolous but upon closer examination, the controversy placed her in a politically much stronger place. For one, it generated publicity that gained her access to the mainstream media. This raised her profile in normally inaccessible domains like East Malaysia. By charging her with sedition, she was made into a political martyr and underdog. The authorities’ decision to drop the charge subsequently made them appear petty and incompetent, as the charge was never tenable in the first place. Through satire Kok was able to raise matters she normally cannot raise in parliament. By virtue of her status as a parliamentarian, her performativity lends credence to the rumours associated with the Prime Minister’s wife, while the satire excuses her from the burden of

proof. A dialectical relationship emerges as her satire sets up an antithesis to the official narrative on current affairs.

8.3 Significance of the research

Up to this point the cases were viewed discretely and in series, that is, one leading to the next. To achieve a macro-view of citizen satire, it is necessary to zoom out and look across the four different sites to see how the dynamics differ in each site, how the consequences vary and what the overall character of citizen satire is. This thesis proposes four major insights that contribute to existing knowledge: citizen satire as a defensive weapon, citizen satire not being a form of activism, citizen satire as a remediation of the political cartoon, and citizen satire as a form of political engagement. This section ends with a brief discussion on the impact of technology and some further thoughts on humour.

8.3.1 Citizen satire as a defensive weapon

The literature on humour often sees it being used as an offensive and hostile weapon (W. A. Coupe, 1969; Larsen, 1980; Plass, 1988; Speier, 1998). This is a good description of satirists in open and democratic societies where citizens are not positioned as inferior or subservient to those in power. In these societies they are guaranteed the right to point out politicians' inadequacies and failings whereas in authoritarian societies, for example the former European communist states, political jokes would have invited greater opprobrium upon the jokers in which case, political humour would have served more as a passive-subversive tool (Davies, 2010, p. 300).

However, the citizen satire of the cases in this study does not fit neatly into either of the above two categories. As residents in hybrid democracies, the citizen satirists in Malaysia and Singapore, while in general still nervous about their satirical activities, nevertheless enjoy relative openness for expressing themselves without serious repercussion so long as they do not cross certain lines. At the same time their satire does not oppose the rulers directly like the way Western satire engages in direct confrontation. Instead they take pot shots from the fringe more in the manner of a heckler at a debate.

This leads me to my conclusion that political humour in Malaysia and Singapore's memes does not function as an offensive weapon in many cases. SGAG, for example, had remained deferential to the Prime Minister and his senior ministers, as evidenced by their reluctance to engage in *ad hominem* attacks. Instead there was heavy use of logic to put forward their counter opinion. This was seen again in the case of the *kangkung* memes, where logic was liberally used to counter the Prime Minister's faulty reasoning. These are defensive rather than offensive moves, as the satirists are fending off assaults first launched by those in power⁶⁶ (for examples, the SMRT CEO's "you break my window..." remark, the threat of the 6.9 million White Paper, and Najib's "price of kangkung has fallen"). The picture that emerges is one of a defiant child talking back to an adult with little hope of winning the argument, no matter how cogent the argument is.

Teresa Kok's satire on the other hand fits more into the offensive and hostile category and this may be explained by her higher social status as a parliamentarian, which makes her a colleague and peer of the Prime Minister in parliament and therefore closer in terms of social standing. The picture is closer to two more evenly matched (but not completely equal) opponents sparring.

8.3.2 Citizen satire is not activism

Scouring through the comments of all four cases, there was no evidence to suggest that the audiences were under Morozov's (2012) illusion that clicking the like or share button is a form of activism in the sense of a mobilising force like with the Arab Spring or Occupy Wall Street. Instead, there was a sense of a shared experience in enjoying a joke together and being part of a community that sees the flaws in the government's policies. Members of the community clicked social buttons to show solidarity with the meme creators, and laughed along to gain social acceptance and approval of other members of their online communities. Comments were posted to share experiences and information. The negotiation of power among members, although harsh at times, contributes to building a uniform identity within their groups by regulating behaviour and opinions. The cognitive and affective

⁶⁶ That is to say those in authority started the fight and not the satirists.

dynamics seen in these cases lend weight to Corner's (2012) argument that they are centrally involved in the construction and maintenance of the political culture and political subjectivity.

The citizen satire in these cases were forms of activism only in so far as it being used for gaining what Cammaerts et al. (2013, p. 5) termed as "visibility" (as in the case of Teresa Kok) and the contest of symbolic power⁶⁷ (for example, SMRT representing the decline in standards in Singapore, or the *kangkung* to represent the ineptness of the Najib administration). Kok claimed that humour had extended her reach in terms of new voters but the evidence is inconclusive. These softer forms of activism, however, are not to be underestimated. Jonathan Gray (in Andersen and Gray, 2007, p. 300) pointed out that while such political comedy is akin to the proverbial "preaching to the choir" it has a similarly powerful effect of regularly renewing, reinforcing and reinvigorating the faith and conviction of the converted, just like the pious religionist. Lockyer (2006, p. 776) similarly argues that the use of satire "maintains and reinforces normative behaviours and values".

It is also undeniable that political humour can hijack the agenda of mainstream media but the results of virality are difficult to guarantee, which makes it a poor primary activism strategy. For example, Teresa Kok's other videos never came close to reaching the same notoriety as her *ONEdeful* Malaysia video. Instead, it appears to complement other strategies and Davies' (2007) description of jokes as an "interim protest" applies to the memes as well. The notion that humour is a decoration on the sword rather than being the sword itself is supported by the present data. However, this does not preclude the possibility of this form of political involvement evolving into new forms of modalities of political organising as traditional modes of civic engagement are eroded (Reilly & Boler, 2014, p. 450)

8.3.3 Citizen satire as a remediation of the political cartoon/joke

An argument had been made that the dominant form of political humour evolves from one age to another depending on the available technology of the day. Using the analytical tools for political cartoons, it was demonstrated that the political meme shares DNA with the political cartoon/joke. Like the political

⁶⁷ The symbolism is useful as a rallying point for those championing a cause, as it adds a focal point to the movement.

cartoonist, the political meme producer draws from the same set of *topoi* of political commonplaces, literary/cultural allusions, personal character traits and situational themes that are “significantly different from those of the oral persuader” (Medhurst & DeSousa, 1981, pp. 198-200). They both carry a rhetorical message framed as either *apologia* or *kategoria*, with the latter attacking either a public figure’s character or policy (Wolfe, 1929). The political Internet meme is not a displacement of the political cartoon but a shift in the protocol by which they are produced and consumed. One of these shifts is the easier access amateur cartoonists now have to its production. Unlike the political cartoon, which requires a skilled artist, an unskilled artist is able to create memes today using online tools (for example, meme generator, or Photoshop) to generate either the single-panel cartoon or a strip comic. Another shift is the more collaborative nature of meme production between the producer and the consumer. Today, the producer can draw from viewers’ comments and suggestions, as in the case of SGAG. The producer could also be a consumer as well. The distribution of visual messages too has changed and individual meme creators can now submit memes to pages like CCWM in order to tap a wider viewer base. Pages like CCWM take over the editorial function that newspaper editors previously performed. They also actively source for memes that align with their own political persuasion. Gatekeeping continues to operate, albeit at a lower bar: page owners check memes for potential controversy that might land them in trouble with the law but by and large memes producer retain control over what they produce as they are not beholden to any publisher. And because the memes are produced mostly by amateurs, citizen satirists enjoy a great deal more independence and freedom of expression, compared to their political cartoonist counterparts.

8.3.4 Citizen satire as political engagement

Earlier, the analogy of political memes as a form of heckling was made. This imagery can be explored further by viewing the principal occupiers of the mainstream media, for example, Prime Minister Najib, as dominating the soapbox and being unwilling to yield his spot to allow others to have their say. Those in the audience who have not been invited to share the stage with the speaker have but one option to interrupt this one-directional rhetoric – heckle. The *kangkung* memes and Teresa Kok’s

ONEderful Malaysia video were virtual boos and shout downs. The primary rhetor, in the face of heckling, can ignore the heckler, have the heckler removed or engage with the heckler. With Kok's video, the government tried to remove her by charging her with sedition. With the *kangkung* memes a more sustained exchange ensued after Najib's speech, which was followed by a series of heckling memes posted by CCWM. Part way, Najib defended himself, which in itself is a clear acknowledgement of the heckling. As the argument progressed, a dialectical relationship emerges, with Najib pushing forward his thesis and the aggregated message of the CCWM memes forming the antithesis. What is interesting is that the disparate citizen memes, on their own, were not sufficient for forming an antithesis, but when strung together by CCWM, a coherent message emerges to challenge Najib's narrative. This is important as the discourse is now balanced, with the heavyweight thesis put forth by the government now being countered by the many lightweight memes coming together to form a now equally weighty antithesis. As a result, viewers have the option of picking the best from both sides of the argument to form their own synthesis.

The Singapore examples, particularly SGAG showed a slightly different picture partly due to the specific nature of this site, but more so because, unlike CCWM, which pulls memes from a variety of sources, SGAG produces its own memes. This gives them control over the political message that goes with the memes. This is significant because SGAG's memes were not countering the White Paper thesis with a credible antithesis, unlike CCWM's memes. To extend the analogy, SGAG's memes and the conversations around them resemble more of a conversation between SGAG and its followers and among the followers themselves, much like a group of colleagues unhappy with a recent announcement by their employer gathering at the water dispenser for a good moan about the implications and foolishness of the new company policy. Unlike CCWM, the Singaporeans in SGAG were not seen to be fighting back. In contrast, memes from the first SMRT case study were individual and discrete and did not form a composite, coherent message that contributes to the political discussion in the same weighty way as the CCWM or SGAG memes. Instead, the memes were more a catharsis for the frustrated in need of ventilation. Mirroring Day's (2011, pp. 43-44) argument for satirical news shows, these memes focus existing frustration with politics and thus act as "surrogates"

articulating that unhappiness through the transformation of what's real into comedy. Gray, Jones & Thompson (2009) similarly argues that "good satire...has a remarkable power to encapsulate public sentiment" (p. 4).

All of these relate back to Buturoiu's (2014) metaphor of various working rooms (or many smaller public spheres) that bring people together for conversations. Depending on the room, one could be just a gathering of complainers, while another could be a room that reassembles different opinions to some form of logic discourse. Lone or individual voices shouting in the hallway contribute little to the overall public sphere. While the humorous memes' central purpose is entertainment and not political discourse, it nevertheless occurs incidentally. The data in this case study lends support to Wojcieszak and Mutz's (2009, p. 50) optimism that discussions on non-political forums "suggest an especially promising contribution of casual political talk online, in that these non-politically motivated exchanges expose participants to dissimilar perspectives" while at the same time acknowledge that these "make limited contributions to promoting cross-cutting discourse".

8.3.5 Limits of citizen satire

In recent times, certain scientific disciplines have been described as facing a "replication crisis" where experimental findings have not or cannot be reproduced by independent researchers (Baker, 2016; Fanelli, 2009; Ioannidis, 2005; Makel, et al., 2012). The present thesis stands outside that problem. It is not experimental in nature and therefore not subject to the same methodological verification process to determine validity, nevertheless, conceptual replicability can be important and highly useful. The findings in this thesis have found similar patterns in humour use, and in particular the limits of satire, which adds further empirical data to previous research and broadens our understanding to include how satire is similarly used outside of the United States and Europe, where much of existing satire studies were conducted,

All four case studies resonated with Marc's (2009) point that citizens are in need of a good laugh to cope with the 24/7/365 bombardment of "horror show[s] of disappointments, brutality, dysfunction,

stupidity, and greed” (p. ix). This was also a key reason given by Kok to justify her satirical video, as she repeatedly described the political situation in Malaysia as “mad”. The SGAG case study highlighted the blurred lines between satire and reality when some members of the audience were unable to see past the satire and took the memes as serious proposals for solving infrastructural problems that will arise from an increased population. The demand for higher critical thinking skills and judgment in order to engage meaningfully in political discourse, highlighted by Baym (2009), Morreale (2009) and Day (2009) was vividly illustrated in the comments analysis of SGAG and Kok’s audiences. The intertextual use of screenshots of Minister Khaw Boon Wan and Minister Amy Khor’s parliamentary appearances shadows comedians Chris Morris and Sacha Baron Cohen’s incorporation of “real interviews” into their comedies to push the boundaries of political imagery further (Gray, 2009)

While a more well-resourced research is need to determine the extent of impact satire had, there is some visible signs that it unified some parts of society within Malaysia and Singapore, traditionally fragmented by race or political ideology, at the very least in terms of political news consumption. This may add to Gray, Jones & Thompson’s (2009) work on television news consumption patterns in Canada. Objection to Kok’s use of humour by her own followers adds to Kuipers’ (2008) work on understanding on how good and bad taste in jokes are defined and to Lockyer & Pickering’s (2006) research on humour’s ability to find societal fault lines and draw boundaries of what is acceptable. Like Thompson (2009) Kok’s video (although mild by Western standard) was provocative and meaningful enough to deal with contentious political issues in a timely manner even though pockets of society felt that it transgressed standards of good taste. And finally, mirroring some of Lockyer’s (2006) findings, in all the case studies, satire enticed audience and raised important questions but were rarely able to answer them, if at all.

8.3.6 Final thoughts on the impact of technology and humour

The option of curtailing activities on the Internet, particularly social media, remains an option for both Malaysia and Singapore, although both regimes are aware of the limits such steps have on truly minimising the impact of freedom of expression. For example, despite the ban on Facebook in China,

it remains accessible through the use of a proxy (Loyola, 2013). Furthermore, the existence of numerous forms of social media makes restriction highly impractical. Jenkins (2006, p. 2) makes a valid point when he said “that the Internet is not just another new medium but an entirely new system that is colliding with the old “where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways”. By taking advantage of the interactive feature of the Internet, citizen satire illustrates well how this collision of power takes place in the most unpredictable way. In the past, with professionally produced political satire mostly done by prominent and skilful artists, derailing their effort was relatively easy. However, when ordinary citizens take to producing satire, the sheer number of producers makes arresting them impractical, in addition to making the authorities appear petty and lose credibility. If they do single out individuals as an object lesson, as in the case of Teresa Kok, legal action over satire is hard to follow through. Although not included as part of the case studies in this research, the political persecution of Malaysian cartoonist Zunar (Agence-France-Presse, 2015) mentioned in passing in earlier chapters illustrates how even when the government continues to harass him in an attempt to silence him the Internet continues to circulate and popularise his work. This has in effect raised his profile to the international media’s attention, and even led to his winning an International Press Freedom Award (Cartoonists Rights Network International, 2016). Politics through the Internet is clearly done differently today. While engagement with political institutions in general is on the decline non-institutionalised fora is gaining traction (Theocharis & Quintelier, 2014). Political humour sites are one non-institutionalised forum.

The political humour in this thesis support Colletta’s (2009, p. 872) argument that incongruity theories explain well how funniness is achieved by highlighting the ridiculous nature of a scenario (for example in this thesis, the breaking of a train window to access fresh air being labelled as a criminal act of vandalism or the representation of a common vegetable as a valuable commodity). Apart from the social function of humour (for example the building of social coherence and identity) it also demonstrated it has strategic utility in terms of political communication that mirrors Meyer’s (1990) study of Ronald Reagan’s use of humour to attack his opponents, release tension among his

audience, as well as softening serious issues like a bleak economy. Kok similarly used it to achieve her political goals. CCWM employed these strategies to challenge the Malaysian government's dominant narrative. Pithy political messages dressed as satire has the potential to disarm an otherwise unsympathetic audience sufficiently long for a point to be made, making accidental exposure to disagreeable views and opinions higher, particularly when it is done through Facebook sharing.

8.4 Limitations and possible future research

The case studies in this thesis have provided in-depth and strongly contextualised profiles of four separate media events. And while they are bound somewhat by close geography and a common theme, i.e. political humour, the selection of the object of study is necessarily selective, with the decision on what to include or exclude resting solely upon me. As such this thesis cannot claim broad generalisability of the findings to all of Malaysia or Singapore, or even to any particular group within each country, unless thorough thought is given in relation to specific cases and contexts. They may, however, provide insight into some of the potentiality that can arise in that region of the world under similar political conditions.

To supplement the findings of this thesis, future research may include an investigation into how political humour is used in other ethnographical sites, either within the same region or internationally, with similar conditions where citizens' right to free expression is neither fully open nor fully restricted. This could potentially advance our understand of political humour as a "defensive" weapon, as opposed to the traditional and stark dichotomy of humour as either an "offensive" weapon or a "subversive/passive" tool. Beyond looking at the nature and the mechanism of humorous visual memes, a perspective that sees them as mere "messages" or "products", more could be done to understand the "cultural practices" that mirror the socio-political contexts in which it exists. A better resourced study could also look into the demographics of the citizen satire audiences and the level of political participation apart from such humour sites. Of interest would be some form of measurement of the incidences of accidental exposure to political information resulting from the sharing of political humour on social media. The misunderstanding of humour use by audiences could also benefit from analysis using miscommunication models like DeMiT proposed by Anolli et al. (2002).

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Appendix: Leslie Chew –*Demon-cratic*

Summary of conversation with Leslie Chew of *Demon-cratic* (Dec 2013)

Background. Leslie Chew is owner of *Demon-cratic*, a satirical Facebook page critical of the PAP government. Leslie, in his own words, has no formal training, no funding, has just an O-level education, a computer and some free software and the ability to make the government jittery. He believes in learning by trial and error and dislike classrooms. Leslie was arrested and under police investigation that lasted 3 months. His cartoons depicted former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew as a racist. He believes the charges were eventually dropped because evidence that Lee Kuan Yew is a racist is abundant and public knowledge; pursuing the charges will only result in the evidence being given prominence.

Motivation. Leslie sees *Demon-cratic* as a form of national service. Leslie feels that people need to take a stand when things go wrong and people who didn't vote the PAP are still liable for a bad government if they did not do enough to persuade others to vote. The purpose of the cartoons is to show people that there is no real danger. He is explaining that there are people who fear even to read his cartoons. He believes that when you make people laugh, the fear disappears. It is also a form of discipline and training, a form of mental exercise for his audience to learn to read socio-political events and see the subtle nuances, hence, the focus on current affairs. Because it is self-funding, however, he has tentatively set 2016 (the year of the next General Election) as a cut-off point.

His goal for *Demon-cratic* is to show up the hypocrisy of those in power: if they want to be a dictatorship then they should just pass a law and become a monarchy. If they want to make criticising the government a crime, pass a law instead of beating around the bush.

Production. He is of the view that people generally don't want to bitch about the government. Instead he prefers to target “assholes” and generally leave hardworking MPs like Tin Pei Ling alone. As a self-taught cartoonist Leslie likes to keep his cartoons simple because “it is [about] the message, not the pictures”, which are just a “means to an end. When *Cartoon Press* was mentioned Leslie explained that they have a more sophisticated approach that requires readers to do a bit more decoding

to understand the humour. Rather than see them as competition Leslie sees this as targeting different segments of the market and signals a good sign that political humourists are complementing each other. He argues that even things like the “theory of relativity”, when taught to kindergarteners, must be elaborated. But to a university student presenting them with just an equation is sufficient. The selection of topics is done arbitrarily and depends on mood.

Audience. His relationship with his audience is at a distance. He lets the reader decide what to make of the cartoon and not much of his is based on feedback of readers, which is not always reliable. Citing example of a cartoon of Lee Kuan Yew with the caption "I hope I die quickly and painlessly. People may agree with the first. Not sure about the second “he expressed surprise why Lee’s supporters got angry as those were Lee’s own words. He also asserts that he was merely expressing what people feel.

Appendix: SGAG Memes

Meme
number.

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



OUR TRAINS

OUR BUSES

7 MILLION PEOPLE? HO SEH BO?!

7.

ONLY 634 UNITS!



con





SEA VIEW

PRIME AREA

TONS OF BBQ PITS

PRIVATE SWIMMING POOL



10 YEARS V

EXPECTED DATE OF COMPL

WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/SGAG.SG
SUBMIT YOUR MEMES TO SGAG.SINGAPORE@GMAIL

8.



9.



10.



11.



12.



13.



14.



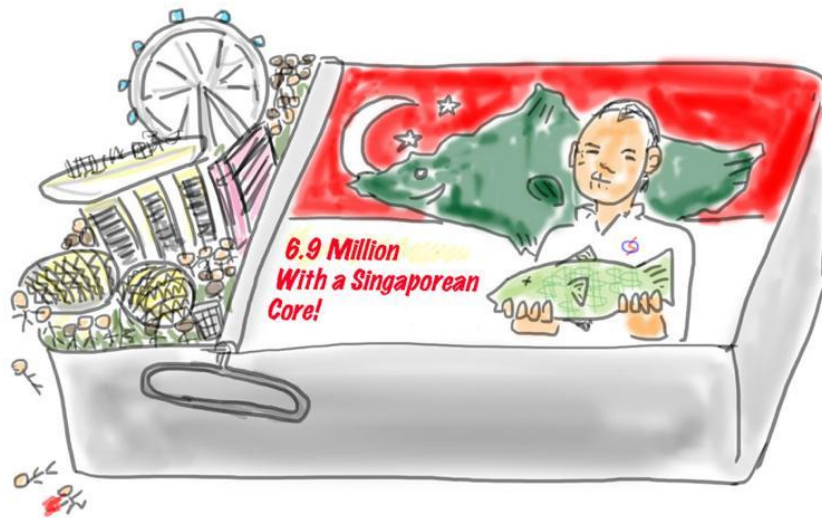
15.



16.



17.



SARDINAPORE

18.



19.



20.

Keep Counting Singapore



We have a vision for tomorrow, just believe, just believe
We have a goal for Singapore, we can achieve, 6.9 million
You and me, we'll do our part
Squeeze and squeeze, tak boleh breathe
We're going to show the world what Singapore can be
We can squeeze, we can squeeze.

There is something down the road that we can strive for
We are told no number is too big that we can't try for
There's a bau in the air, it's a fart somebody shared
We're going to build a better can, for you and me
We can squeeze, we can squeeze.

Keep counting Singapore, count on me to squeeze lagi more
You and me, we'll do our part
Squeeze and squeeze, tak boleh breathe
We're going to show the world what Singapore can be
We can squeeze, we can squeeze.

Chorus:
Keep counting Singapore, Keep counting Singapore
Keep counting and I will squeeze some more
Keep counting Singapore

(Repeat Chorus)

Together Singapore Singapore (X 2)

21.

**9GAG Singapore**
5 minutes ago

Dear PM Lee Hsien Loong, if we get 1 million likes for this status, can you not increase the population to 6.9 million? Pretty prease?

Unlike · Comment · Share 17

You and 600 others like this.

**9GAG Singapore**
10 minutes ago

Dear PM Lee Hsien Loong, if we get 1 million likes for this status, can you not increase the population to 6.9 million? Pretty prease?

Unlike · Comment · Share 41

You and 1,101 others like this.

**9GAG Singapore**
15 minutes ago

Dear PM Lee Hsien Loong, if we get 1 million likes for this status, can you not increase the population to 6.9 million? Pretty prease?

Unlike · Comment · Share 59

You and 1,419 others like this.

**9GAG Singapore**
20 minutes ago

Dear PM Lee Hsien Loong, if we get 1 million likes for this status, can you not increase the population to 6.9 million? Pretty prease?

Unlike · Comment · Share 77

You and 1,756 others like this.

22.



23.



24.



25.



26.

30 minutes ago near Singapore

When you allow HDB flats to remain so expensive, its like throwing a spanner into my future plans.

I will not be able to deliver the babies as promised to my parents.
On behalf of my parents I ask your great Party, please rethink your idea and your approach.
Please spare a thought for us.

We are all Singaporeans too.

And many of us are making plans to quickly have the keys to our homes.
So that we can set up our families, and have babies.
Please don't disrupt our plans.

Unlike · Comment · Share















 You and 4 others like this.



Appendix: Teresa Kok - comments


Numbers have been added for easy reference. Personal identifiers have been scrubbed to protect the identify of commentators.

Key: y= approve of video, n-disapprove of video, r=Kok's interaction, d=argumentative comments, x=off topic comments, ss=sharing, b=blank, ?=uncategorised

Code	Comments
y	1.  Dear Yb Teresa , good video clip and we will support PKR all the way.Happy New Year,,,,, Like · Reply · 33 · 29 January 2014 at 01:02
r	2.   Thanks. It should be PR, Pakatan Rakyat. PKR is Anwar's party :-)) Like · 18 · 29 January 2014 at 23:52
y	3.   對白很好笑， 笑到我眼淚流。 Dialogue is funny, laughing my tears flow.Translated by Bing Like · 5 · 1 February 2014 at 12:55
n	4.   Sarcasm might be entertaining but it doesn't solve our national problems. We want to see politicians from both sides coming up with constructive solutions. Please stop wasting time in producing these videos. Since Pakatan (DAP included) is running the Selangor government, please help us to reduce crimes in this state. Like · Reply · 69 · 29 January 2014 at 19:53
r	5.  Teresa Kok Police force is not under state government, that's why the former CPO arrested our ADUN and MP when they joint the Bersih candle light vigil Like · 26 · 29 January 2014 at 23:49
d	6.   Thanks for replying so politely, Theresa.We have loud rude people teaching polticians how to do their job and yet they show their ignorance of the Constitution by not even knowing the difference between the powers of the State and that of the Federal Government.Maybe wearing cow bells is in order. Like · 26 · 30 January 2014 at 01:32
d	7.   Next thing you know the Ah Peks and Ah Sums will be demanding you stop waging the war of words, instead go to OUG and clean up the longkangs since DBKL is not doing it. Like · 9 · 30 January 2014 at 01:39
y	8.   Satire and ridicule are useful tools for illuminating reality. Like · 3 · 30 January 2014 at 05:19


d

9.

 Everyone has a right to air their opinion. Everyone is frustrated with the level of crime rates and it's only natural to air their grievances. If the information is incorrect, a gentle correction is fine like what Teresa did. No rebuke is necessary. Opinions that run contrary does not warrant any sarcasm. If we keep doing this we are no better than the federal government. Second, we would not win any hearts nor minds to our cause.
Like · 16 · 30 January 2014 at 06:26


y

10.

 I thought the video was fun and brilliant. Not sure why people has to get all uptight.
Like · 2 · 2 February 2014 at 03:22


d

11.

 Thinking and doing your homework first before making wild accusations is a sign of good education, failure to do so deserves shame. It is a mark of civilisation and prevents unnecessary conflicts for eg. in the streets when driving. If everyone uses more brains than their emotions there would be less conflicts everywhere. Blatant ignorance is not something to be proud of especially if one thinks one is entitled to it because one has 2 sen in the pocket, dont know ask. Loud and fierce, loud and inaccurate people are a sign of backwardness like the people in the Federal side, making excuses for them will not win any hearts or minds to whatever cause in mind.
Like · 8 · 2 February 2014 at 23:35 · Edited


x

12.

 Even though the Police is not under the Selangor State Government, there are civil societies in KL and PJ coming up with solutions to reduce crimes. Gan Seong Keng and Yvonne Chung, may I meet up with you to share what I am doing to make Malaysia a better place before you label me as a keyboard warrior?
Like · 6 · 4 February 2014 at 15:06


x

13.

 I'd rather have a face-to-face dialogue as FB discussion gives rise to a lot of misunderstanding.
Like · 2 · 4 February 2014 at 18:41


d

14.

 We have no freedom is speech in Malaysia. WE can only do it in sarcasm you idiot.
Like · 9 · 4 February 2014 at 19:48


x

15.

 Thank you, Nicholas Low.
Like · 4 February 2014 at 19:49

y

16.

 This video is very funny yet so true, smhow could create some awareness smhow i support Phang too, lets focus on what we can do. Alot more we can do for Selangor, maybe can create another video clip to boost morale for selangor people "Semangat Satu Selangor" or "Kita Cinta Rakyat Selangor"
Like · 3 · 5 February 2014 at 04:12

x

17.

Thanks Melissa J. Chen. I was about to quit this discussion thread until I read your brilliant idea about creating another video clip to boost the morale of Selangor ppl.

We can start by organising a brainstorming session to discuss the following:

1. Identify the issues in the State
2. Get the Selangor government's input regarding their plans for the State.
3. Strategise on how we can align our residents to the State Government's goals to make Selangor a better place.
4. Solicit a "call for action" from Selangor residents to do their bit in order to reach our goals.
5. Use social media to educate and update Selangor residents on the State Government's progress in their service projects.

This will take hard work and the results won't be instant. But if we keep on working at it, we will see the results in five years' time. Then there will be facts and figures to show for the next election.

This way, there is no need to wait for CNY to speak out. Besides, many do not want to see a happy festive occasion turn into a period of tension. As Chinese, we learnt from our elders to avoid saying bad things and quarrelling during CNY. Let's use CNY to reach out to our non-Chinese fellow citizens by inviting them to join in our celebrations.

There is a FAST GROWING minority of Selangor ppl who, after giving the Opposition two opportunities to govern the state, will evaluate their performance and vote accordingly in the next election.

Like · 2 · 5 February 2014 at 18:31 · Edited

x

18.

, thanks for giving me a chance. I wouldn't have shared all these ideas if I sense that ppl are not ready to do something positive. There are still many ideas I would like to bounce off if there are enough ppl here committed to doing something positive for Selangor.

Like · 5 February 2014 at 18:24 · Edited

x

19.

Yes, since Selangor is my kampung where I grew up in, I want the best for my State. Next election, I will vote for anyone whose action speaks louder than words. I do not practise blind loyalty to any political party.

Like · 2 · 5 February 2014 at 18:29 · Edited

x

20.



yb just highlite the pass n to remind them to do better job.

Like · 6 February 2014 at 14:26 · Edited

d

21.

making this video doesn't mean they are not doing their job.u can direct giving suggestions here without saying people 'wasting time of making this video clip'.this clip is meant to be sarcasm and for CNY wishing.it's an art of giving words..u seemed over confident of what u r saying until u said ppl wasting time of doing this video.this is a video clip that meant to entertain malaysian and gentle remind the youngster of new generation what's really happening in malaysia..to bring up conscious before next elections.

Like · 2 · 20 February 2014 at 15:09 · Edited

d

22.



1) Is this the way of teaching? My faith says love your enemy and pray for them to find the right path...

2) The clip never insults any races or religions. It only tells the scandals, corruption, cronyism, nepotism, misused of power by the politicians and their families. Do Malays from PKR, PAS, DAP, or Chinese or Indians feel insulted from this clip? You have the answer. Those feel guilty feel insulted...as said "siapa makan cili, dialah rasa pedas"....

Do you remember;

- who and why Altantuya was killed? Where are the murderers? You judge.
- Where is the billions lost from PKFZ? Where are the corruptors and money? You judge.
- MAS lost of 200 million from Tajuddin. You judge.
- 250 million of cow project, who get the project and how the fund was spent? You judge.
- Perwaja Steel by the late of Eric Chia?
- bought binocular, screw drivers, wall clock beyond than market price....
- million dollar of "cincin" without proper explanation...
- sent people to space and antarctica, for what?
- the king of tycoon in sawarak, how rich is this tycoon and his families....
- and many many many more....

Are these cases considered closed and gone? You judge then.

DO NOT JUDGE THE VIDEO BY SAYING IT IS RACIST OR INSULTS
MALAYS/ISLAM UNLESS YOU HAVE SEEN IT WITH SOMEONE KNOWS
CHINESE AND/CANTONESE.

I have seen it and I do not see any single word or action insulting Malay and Islam. I appeal to you all, go and see it before you judge..please, please...

3)The terrorists in Sabah, it is true and fact....

I am from Tawau, Sabah, we experience number of incidents when the terrorists or pirates from South of Philippines entered Sabah's soil and kidnapped and killed Sabahans/tourists. a) Lahad Datu bank gun fires, b) Semporna police station bombed, c) Sipadan kidnapping, d) Sahabat Felda invasion, and recent case e) Taiwanese couple been killed and kidnapped. What and why Shafie Aqdal wants to deny on this fact....Why this people can easily enter and out from Sabah? Shafie should answer this. Do not forget the unsettled Project IC too..where is the "before election formed RCI"? Wayang? You judge.

This is what the video clips want to convey its true messages...just simple as that...nothing to do with races or religions...those feel guilty, feel the pinch try to use religion and racism to cover their ugly faces and misconducts.....use wisdom to judge but not emotion....

Remember, this group or party only has four things to survive, campaign and attack others;

- a) religion,
- b) race,
- c) SEX and SEX, SEX videos, and
- d) instant or sweet money e.g BRIM

What else...

And who they use as their tools;

- a) police,
- b) Utusan, TV 3, RTM or all the national medias
- c) PERKASA,
- d) Jabatan Agama,
- e) SPR,
- f) KWSP (take people money give BRIM, BRIM, BRIM, and BRIM)
- f) and all the authorities under theirs

One silly IQ test for you all, if this similar incident happens to Pakatan Rakyat or Chinese, do they act? How fast they act? Do they practice double standard? How many big cases involve this party or individuals (including corruption and misconducts) really put on trial and end up in jail?

Scandals, corruption, nepotism, cronyism, misused of power, and weak of administration - it is all in their blood...correct? Apply your knowledge and wisdom to judge, do not use emotion and be trapped in their game of provocation and dirty tactic. This is only done by this "particular group" because we believe majority of Malaysians and our religions/faiths teach us with love and respect to all mankind because we all belongs to The Almighty God.

4) Suggestion to this group of peoples/party;

WHY NOT YOU DO SIMILAR PROTEST AND OFFER RM500 or RM1200 TO CATCH THE CORRUPTED POLITICIANS AND PUT THEM INTO JAIL OR CHOP/CUT THEIR HANDS FOR STEALING PEOPLE HARD EARNED MONEY - THEN, YOU WILL EARN MY RESPECT AND LIFTING UP AND PRACTICING YOUR RELIGION TEACHING.....

PEACE with you all...

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 53 · 11 February 2014 at 05:08

- y 23. [redacted] u good sharing thanks
Like · 13 February 2014 at 07:38
- n 24. [redacted] I personally don't find this funny and frankly speaking a number of my friends have a lot of doubts in visiting Malaysia after watching this.


It is easy to go **destructive** when you want to win a war, but that makes you no different from the very same evil you are fighting.
Like · Reply · 25 · 3 February 2014 at 22:23
- d 25. [redacted] How is Teresa related to PKR? She is from DAP OMG
- n 26. [redacted] Miss Kok. We all hear these things everyday.

Since funny doesn't equal to **constructive**, why not give Malaysians a break and ease the tension for a while?

No need to create such video. A sincere CNY greeting without propaganda will do.


Salam Malaysia Masih Aman.
Like · Reply · 47 · 29 January 2014 at 03:05
- ? 27. [redacted] see beyond the bygone everyday but critics good for the people is always alive in a politicians like football fanatics, see football, eat football n sleep football, what r u? what a world wud u like for d little baby u r carry in your profile pic..... A better 2morow is consequent to a good planning today.. Hapi, hapi CNY 2 u.
Like · 2 · 29 January 2014 at 13:29
- y 28. [redacted] This is just a politician joke for CNY... **why so serious?** I think it is a good laugh...
Like · 19 · 29 January 2014 at 16:14
- ? 29. [redacted] think this video is not meant for you, just be patient!
Like · 2 · 29 January 2014 at 20:18
- y 30. [redacted] Many like the sarcasm in the video not just becoz it is funny. It is because they are so **'tense up' inside that they about to blow up**. They need an 'outlet' to **vent those negative feelings, if not anger**. Don't u think that this is better than violence or aggression?
Like · 11 · 3 February 2014 at 14:33

n

31.  I don't agree. By now the opposition should go on to next level discuss / debate about policies and not to ridicule others. I don't think politicians in mature democratic countries like US and UK or even the Australian will do such thing. The fact that they only put English subtitle means it is only intended to make this video available mainly to non Malay only. This will only **make our society even more polarized and give** an excuse for BN to say DAP means for non Malay mainly Chinese only.


[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [20](#) · [3 February 2014 at 00:01](#) · [Edited](#)

y

32.  Nothing wrong with videos just **political issues** ;3 and all Malay Indian Chinese.. We're in good country now but the problem is from our government now.. No need be such racist among us.. We shared everything now.. Better observe our government now.. See how are you najib ? Sawi bila mahu turun ?.._.


[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [19](#) · [9 February 2014 at 11:27](#)

n

33.  Come on Teresa, don't **waste ur time** in producing this stupid video. U've been a MP for few terms, what have u done for the rakyat? ZERO..... Don't be like LGE, say one thing but do another. Pls. mirror ur own self.


[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [19](#) · [4 February 2014 at 21:23](#)

y

34.  Thumb up for Teresa and her team. I really enjoyed it so much...

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [18](#) · [28 January 2014 at 20:09](#)

n

35.  How **lowly** DAP and PR politicians **have stooped!!** And small wonder! I strongly suggest to the likes of Teresa Kok, to truly and conscientiously spend time to **focus on and scrutinize the weaknesses and failures in yr own governance**, if you are serious abt building a better Malaysia.. I am NOT a BN supporter, but look at the tussles surrounding the Selangor MB office since May 2013. There is a tolled highway (Kidex) which the Selangor State govt is permitting to double-deck over 14 km of existing PJ roads, threatening 3,784 properties with forced acquisition and displacement hardships. This highway is rumored to be awarded by the BN Federal govt to a crony concessionaire, but the act of the State govt to publish a July 2013 gazette on the land acquisitions, hence collaborating with such a crony, is hanging its own dirty linen to dry, because it contradicts head-on all the promises of fighting against corruption, and ridding cronyism. Additionally, when viewed against the PR Buku Jingga manifesto (section on The People's Well-Being, sub-section on Abolish Tolls), PR / PKR /DAP are magnifying the stink from its dirty linen by allowing a TOLLED highway through a city under its rule! Everything else is ROTTEN in the House of Selangor, from illegally approved building developments not complying with Rules and Acts, to rubbish disposal, to simple things like conditions of roads and drains. I would certainly share yr video, but with this write-up as introductory remarks to highlight and intensify attention on your govt's classless, ineffective and irresponsible approach.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [16](#) · [1 February 2014 at 01:02](#)

x

36.

██████████ YB MIGHT not know. When my area full of bad smell. I wrote sms and email to YB in my area. Not even entertained.

In my opinion it would be the same regardless which party. Human attitude tends to forget citizen when we are in trouble.

I posted in my fb and get media attention. Only the problem solved. I have all the evidence to show n prove with non respondent. After 5 days only they replied email! Better not to do the Hu ha after the problems solved. Feel so shame with the DAP actions.

I need to specially thank to my PhD students and the community to solve taman seraya, ampang area problem. Action speak louder than word!

Like · Reply · 17 · 30 January 2014 at 04:01

d/x

37.

██████████ I am in YB Teresa constituency. She respond to every of my email on a rogue developer in my area. No response from MCA's Nicole and DBKL though. What's wrong with you? Can't take a joke? Go watch Saturday Night Lives maybe you will lose up a bit. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0vVKZL-Z7I
Like · 5 · 2 February 2014 at 03:31

dx

38.



██████████ I don't know about you guys under the FT, but over in Selangor, we bring such matters to the attention of the state assemblymen and not the MPs. Members of Parliament represent the rakyat on other issues, not take care of bad smells.

Did you try contacting DBKL about this first?

Actually, I would also be hesitant to bringing this to my state assemblyman. I would rather contact the town council, if that fails, the state exco in charge then only the state assemblymen. But certainly not the MP.

Perhaps things are different for you guys because there isn't a state assembly....
Like · 2 · 4 February 2014 at 19:56

d

39.



██████████ We are all pendatang period...no one truly can claim rights to this land except the true natives who are not getting half the privilege that they are to be accorded..if you do not believe go and see for yourself. Twisting issues and blowing out of proportion only brews trouble. Have issues with the video discuss on its contents do not drag racial issues. Its a shame after many decades we are still at square 1.

Like · Reply · 15 · 8 February 2014 at 12:55











y

40.

██████████ Just Comment,
age 15-20 will say this is funny
age 20-30 will say it is true but what can you do.
age 30-40 will say "that why we trust you to change"
age 40-50 will say "this is true meh? BN la"
age 50-60 will say "DO you know what BN done well?"

I personally feel this is a very good video and please send it to BN, police, majlis pebandaran, NGO, etc and ask for a open debate then this video is worth^^

Like · Reply · 13 · 10 February 2014 at 15:27

- x 41.  Come onlah...i am one of the bananas and used to study with all races and till now i do have all races of frens...dun be racist in this modern malaysia...lets blame the current gov...they are the one playing fire among us so that they can keep in power..i hope all the malays think like Mr Zairul...he is a good example and not being easily manipulated by gov who is playing racist game...last word,we all malaysian now is hoping to see a better malaysia...no matter who is governing....but what we need are capable leaders who can bring malaysia towards better nation...at least same par like Spore...we are really lagging behind so much now...
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 14 · 10 February 2014 at 05:52
- r 42.  Dear YB...no reply mine???
[Like](#) · 10 February 2014 at 21:25
- n 43.  R U a learned YB or otherwise? Such videos does not solve anything but only worsened existing tension. Why waste time and hard earned money of the rayats. I admired U when U first appeared in Malaysian politics. But now it seemed U are no better than some evil politicians you're fighting. Cheap n low down publicity.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 13 · 7 February 2014 at 05:59
- n 44.  I think we should not create such a provoking clip. As a Malaysian, let's take a break this CNY and build up one another among race and religion.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 · 29 January 2014 at 05:20
- d 45.  Don't u c that YB is trying to do just that with her critics when others r not. Pl realise that it is thtru' their critics that we still have d little things in live. Pl c beyond today for a better 2morow not for u but our generations to come. Can YB be wrong when most, if not all (except u n a few others) likes the clip? Open up n have a hapi, hapi CNY n always have in your mind with a better 2morow for all.
[Like](#) · 29 January 2014 at 13:40 · Edited
- n 46.  This critics will nvr ends if u keep doing. Keep doing as what u guys like to do. This critics war will never going to end just like you.
[Like](#) · 2 · 29 January 2014 at 19:09
- d 47.  Come on, it's a joke, why are people so uptight? Why can't just have a few good laugh? It's not high school for goodness sake, loosen up a bit.
[Like](#) · 3 · 2 February 2014 at 03:26
- d 48.  Loosen up a bit guys, it's a joke.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSOLz1YBFG0>
[Like](#) · 2 February 2014 at 03:37
- d 49.  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0vVKZL-Z7I
[Like](#) · 2 February 2014 at 03:37
- x 50.  Teresa kok....a good leader ??? This is the way she handle things. I got no and won't respect her. No wonder so many businessmen said, who the he'll is Teresa kok????
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 13 · 3 February 2014 at 06:56

y

51.



One reason Malaysians are able to remain sane under our present difficult political environment is because of these sarcasms, allowing us to let off steam, so to speak. If we are without these outspoken politicians to check and stop these abuses, we should be dead meat by now! Keep up the good work YB Teresa Kok, thank you!

Like · Reply · 12 · 2 February 2014 at 16:04

y

52.

I do not see this production is waste of money or time or meaningless because bringing PSY to M'sia was more costly than this. Politician do not have to be in politic all the time, they do need to come out from their job and celebrate festive season with the public and this is what I see as the real intention of this production. At least they are not using ppl's money to advertise it on TV which done by our "beloved" Jibby.

Like · Reply · 12 · 30 January 2014 at 02:38

d

53.

this video got nothing to do with race...its solely bout msian political scenes...we shud not raise a racial related issues at all cost nor we shud think about it. Then only we may progress well in all sectors

Like · Reply · 11 · 8 February 2014 at 03:05

d

54.

It amazes me how some idiots can still relate harmless satire to religion and racism. But then again only they would have the time to go around on other people's videos spreading hate. Happy CNY =^^=!

Like · Reply · 11 · 2 February 2014 at 22:20

x

55.

Talk politics no1 but action to help people = zero. Community and Facebook help is more efficient and effective. Malaysian need to wake up to help ourselves. Don't be cheated by those sweet talk that actually waste our time. If you see it as entertainment it is great. Proven with my experience when I wrote email and sms to MP taman teratai!

After the case solve for 5 days only with one email to refer to authority.

If a person die, 3 days is the maximum funeral.

It is 5 days after the case solved! !! (Not initiated)

Pity as as innocent citizen that suffers. When we need help. Those hand phone and sms number written on their name card during party campaign is actually just an entertainment for us.

It is a very good case study what is called governs with heart and soul!

Leader without soul is actually using the citizen for their own benefits.

Trust Facebook and your own hand to help yourselves.

P/s= can you imagine it is only extremely bad odour. If the more serious case how could it be?

I does not belong to any parties. Just share as a civilised citizen!

in the future, do not waste money and time to call/sms/emails when you need help to solve community problem.

Like · Reply · 12 · 30 January 2014 at 05:52

y

56.

For a Better Malaysia indeed, God Bless You YB Teresa!!! You got me laughing so hard!

Like · Reply · 10 · 28 January 2014 at 19:41

y

57.



Unbelievable. Great production !
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 9 · 5 February 2014 at 03:07

n

58.

Thian Boonseng, having fun at the expense of the people's welfare, and claiming in the introductory msg to "work together for a better Malaysia"? If this is not cheap, classless propaganda, diverting focus from PR / DAP's own weaknesses, I don't know what else to call it! BUT DEFINITELY NOT JUST HAVING FUN, PLEASE! Politicians should stop politicking, go to the people and listen to their needs, empathize with their hardships, then devise proactive ways (as opposed to criticism or mere reaction) to establish better systems and implement holistic solutions that will truly and effectively strategize a better Malaysia. [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 9 · 1 February 2014 at 22:03

n

59.

YB, there are more impptant things to do than this.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 9 · 29 January 2014 at 14:52

x

60.

Change ourselves before we can change Government. Pay taxes fully..don't cheat. Don't buy imitation cd's, clothes, bags. Souvenirs. Don't download illegal music. Don't give favours, bribe and then say officials, police corrupt. So on and so forth. Cultural Revolution to rid corruption killed millions but did not rid corruption. Confucius born at time of Great Corruption. Yes! we Chinese know a lot about corruption..Before we look at others..look in mirror first.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 10 · 10 February 2014 at 15:59

y

61.

What the heck , ? I just watched the video and there is nothing wrong with it ! C'mon grow up and be more mature.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 8 · 8 February 2014 at 22:46

d

62.



Where has any religious or discriminatory subject been touched here..hmmm.. This is a case of...Siapa makan cili, dia rasa pedas...
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 9 · 10 February 2014 at 23:19

x

63.

to all malaysian...used your brain....be smart person...make a change for our generations....good luck for justice in our country Malaysia...ubah!!!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 9 · 10 February 2014 at 21:26

x


64.



Malaya was restructured as the Federation of Malaya in 1948, and achieved independence on 31 August 1957. Malaya united with North Borneo, Sarawak, and Singapore on 16 September 1963, with si being added to give the new country the name Malaysia. Less than two years later in 1965, Singapore was expelled from the federation. Sila lah buka buku sejarah
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 9 · 8 February 2014 at 03:55

d

65.

I don't think Islam teaches you to be a racist, Faizul Rashid. So, apart from a racist sentimen that you are now trying to portray through your comment, I do not know what else it means.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 9 · 7 February 2014 at 22:15

- x 66.
[REDACTED] I believe some of "malay sii" also vote u during election last time.... but where is ur respect for the malay voter.... Im not good in the politic but I still believe we live in the same roof with all bangsa...
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 9 · 5 February 2014 at 05:13
- y 67.
[REDACTED] Lo Si Mah! SUPERB!!!!!! Happy Chinese New Year to you Teresa, People are behind you. BLessings
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 8 · 28 January 2014 at 16:57
- n 68.
[REDACTED] CNY is time to be united irrespective of different political ideology. Do not politicise and do some good deeds instead of **creating hatred among the rakyat**.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 8 · 3 February 2014 at 16:06
- n 69.
[REDACTED] stupid ... **waste this money** for this kind of movie , why not do something more warm and touching story line..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 8 · 31 January 2014 at 23:35
- x 70.
[REDACTED] respect each other...agree to wat had been agreed...everybody live happily ever after....corrupted gov must be change..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 7 · 11 February 2014 at 20:05 · [Edited](#)
- d 71.
[REDACTED] Then this is totally the wrong post that u are involving in...one shud talk n discuss bout the topic stated not some other issues from some other topic. (E.g u may not like when ur kid do not answer to ur current question, instead the ur kid is driving u on 'merry go round'. Rationalism vs emotions...
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 7 · 8 February 2014 at 03:46
- x 72.
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] Malaya should be the grateful ones enjoying all that Borneo oil money getting fat and lazy!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 7 · 8 February 2014 at 00:23
- n 73.
 [REDACTED] **Don't you have better things to do?** I respect you before but i don't think i do now. In dire times like this enough insults should be thrown, directly or satirically, it is just bad tastes and bad timings. Would you like if others do the same to you? Don't go that low, you are worst then those whom you implied in this clip. May you find peace in your life. Happy new year.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 7 · 5 February 2014 at 12:24
- n 74.
[REDACTED] Stupid show
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 7 · 5 February 2014 at 01:14

- x 75.
[REDACTED] Ineffectiveness of government is one issue. Our concern as mankind they do not governs with heart. Everything for their own benefit. A simple acknowledge sometimes is a cure of the citizen who in dilemma. Please imagine when you whole community is facing a certain that involved the whole area at least of 5 km radius and when you report it there becomes no issues. Worst thing is they are using it as the tool of political promotion after the case is solved by Facebook community. It is a claim of credit. Instead of wasting time n resources to do such video and putting Blame on other, why they do not spend time to help the community in need out there?! I doubt!!!
[Like · Reply · 7 · 1 February 2014 at 16:02](#)
- n  76.
[REDACTED] **Wasting time** to see this video.... only sarcasm form her
[Like · Reply · 7 · 31 January 2014 at 22:46](#)
- y 77.
[REDACTED] Hahahaha..... So funny... So true..
[Like · Reply · 6 · 28 January 2014 at 16:13](#)
- y 78. Wilson Low Wilson Low How many marks u give for the video?
[Like · 2 · 28 January 2014 at 19:38](#)
- y  [REDACTED] awesome
[Like · 1 · 28 January 2014 at 23:12](#)
- x 79.
[REDACTED] haha. What a kangkung brain. The origin of the name of Malaysia also dunno and some more make up stories to show how stupid and pathetic you are. Obviously macai second class. Malay in asia? Lol. Where else could it be? Antartica?
[Like · Reply · 6 · 8 February 2014 at 00:17](#)
- x 80.
[REDACTED] Besides, according to human governance principle, we need not be responsible to anyone but to the creator. The action of producing this video is described as putting and finding fault of others and make it as a joke. It spoils the country image and manipulating the psychology and mind of innate human. Where is the humanity? Where is the leadership? Where is the justice? It is just a game to us. However, the real community problem is being ignored. Even Facebook community do acknowledge and help. What is those politicians? Sms sent, email sent are worse effort as compared to the Facebook community post. Wake up Malaysian. Take care of yourselves and need not waste time to care much of those politic game. We are just nothing over the election. When we are in trouble. Post in Facebook rather than writing to complaint. Proven case study!
[Like · Reply · 6 · 1 February 2014 at 16:07](#)
- y 81.
[REDACTED] Well done YB.
[Like · Reply · 4 · 28 January 2014 at 17:06](#)
- x 82.
[REDACTED] Dont be bias, there is a lot of hidden truth of who is profiting at the end. Gov yes, the raising effect is maybe at 30% but 70% of the hike caused by people and corporation's greed.
[Like · Reply · 4 · 29 January 2014 at 17:05](#)
- y 83.
[REDACTED] Thumbs up, YB.
[Like · Reply · 4 · 28 January 2014 at 19:13](#)

- y 84.
 [REDACTED] It's a fact... Every rakyat is suffering cos of the price hike !
 No man is an island !
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 5 · 8 February 2014 at 17:30
- d 85.
 [REDACTED] what about the orang asli? They are called that because they are the original people. So you can take your melayu asli crap and stuff it. I'm sure my fellow orang borneo wouldn't want to be called melayu with the likes of you.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 5 · 8 February 2014 at 00:13
- y 86.
 [REDACTED] good...really funny and reflected citizens emotion
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · 29 January 2014 at 11:22
- y 87.
 [REDACTED] I think it is good - you need to de stress in a humorous way despite all the stones cast - the horse make sure get a knight with shining armours and not the Fei Poh riding it
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 5 · 29 January 2014 at 05:16
- x 88.
 [REDACTED] Muslims in Malaysia hope that Non Muslim Chinese who are main players in our food industry do respect our Halal logo by using it appropriately... We are starting losing our trust and that is going to be bad for our society....
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · 13 February 2014 at 03:49
- y 89.
 [REDACTED] just for fun..y so serious?? better than u guys jz know to make noise here, anything u do for tis country?? if no, jz keep quite la..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · 11 February 2014 at 17:35
- y 90.
 [REDACTED] Good one teresa kok.. iSupport
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · 9 February 2014 at 20:11
- y 91.
 [REDACTED] we support you
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · 6 February 2014 at 14:12
- n 92.
 [REDACTED] CHEAP and BAD TASTE.It shows the character unbecoming of a politician who yells UBAH,but hasn't UBAH at all.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · 4 February 2014 at 19:07
- y 93.
 [REDACTED] Even though i don't understand Mandarin nor kantonis but based on subtitle in English i manage to get the clear message being delivered on the CNY 2014 clearly YB Teresa Kok, It's a Excellent job!!!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · 4 February 2014 at 07:27
- y 94.
 [REDACTED] Thank YB for sharing this video. You all discuss our nation issues deeply. We hope for the better future and we fight together
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · 30 January 2014 at 14:13

- x 95.
[REDACTED] I appreciate anyone could share my thought and voice so that we do not waste time n money to wait for non respondent. It is so hard just to acknowledge? I really doubt
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [5](#) · [30 January 2014 at 05:54](#)
- y 96. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Pls have Tamil subtitles to share with my fellow Indians. Also why no Malay subtitles, and exclude nearly 60 % of society. Kita semua muhibbah, bukan ?
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [4](#) · [29 January 2014 at 13:01](#)
- y 97. [REDACTED] You are right Julian, where are the subtitles???
[Like](#) · [1](#) · [3 February 2014 at 14:21](#)
- y 98. [REDACTED] Way to go by Teresa! Wishing u success in yr future.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [4](#) · [28 January 2014 at 19:35](#)
- y 99. [REDACTED] Onederful Presentation. TQ YB and team. All the Best for the Horse year.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [29 January 2014 at 00:53](#)
- y 100. [REDACTED] Send this video to Wee Ka Seong, MCA. Ask him to explain which part is against the malay muslim. Malaysian want to know, lah.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [11 February 2014 at 02:17](#)
- x 101. [REDACTED] if there is no malay indian and chinese fight for independence from the british, malaysia will still be called as malaya not tanah melayu. be grateful that you can rule the country and not the british
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [8 February 2014 at 19:04](#)
- x 102. [REDACTED] I understand what uncle fat say already
xD
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [8 February 2014 at 01:12](#)
- x 103. [REDACTED] Malaysia does not belong to Malay only..we have Iban, kadazan, pilipino, bajau, indian and of course Chinese.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [7 February 2014 at 11:31](#)
- d 104. [REDACTED] Actually the YB film is not so interesting & good show....lol.
After some idiot "don't NO" adding extra salts. peppers, chillies and goreng it.. Now it becomes famous & well known.... tks to Idiot "don'tNO".....
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [6 February 2014 at 15:49](#)
- d 105. [REDACTED] Whether you agree or don't, be gentleman no personal attack especially the marital status.We despise you!Not everyone is fated to a married life.If you happen to be the blessed one,please treasure and don't take it for granted or misuse it as weapons in anyway.God bless you!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [4 February 2014 at 20:33](#)

y

106.



██████████ You light up my Horse Year. Thanks.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [3 February 2014 at 18:15](#)

n

107.



██████████ I agree with mr. ██████████... This Teresa Kok is not there as an MP to 'have fun'. She's there to serve the 'rakyat' (pun intended). And this video is definitely neither serving nor helping the 'rakyat'.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [1 February 2014 at 23:53](#)

n

108.

██████████ I tried to feel entertained. But i couldn't its too long and overall not that funny. Better put it down before get more "kutuks"
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [31 January 2014 at 16:24](#)

x

109.



██████████ Madam kok Sri petaling, oug, and surroundings are full of garbage and littering are rampant pls look into it
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [29 January 2014 at 16:06](#)

n

110.

██████████ Dont like this video
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [29 January 2014 at 13:00](#)

y

111.

██████████ you YB Theresa! I'm all cracked up! Hahahaha!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [29 January 2014 at 01:22](#)

y

112.

██████████ Really "Onderful" ~ Jus Love It"
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [28 January 2014 at 22:14](#)

n

113.


██████████ Mind your own... Do what the best to country not politics and do your best part
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3](#) · [28 January 2014 at 18:13](#)

y

114.

██████████, YB u r the best. Gong Xi Fa Cai.
██████████ · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [29 January 2014 at 09:38](#)

x

 My apologies if my feedback has offended supporters who find the video brilliant.

However, shouldn't we be focusing on building up the State instead of wasting our resources tearing down personalities?

Perhaps mine is a lone voice expressing the frustrations of one who voted the Opposition into power.

If YB Teresa Kok is prepared to listen to the voice of a growing minority, I'd be glad to meet and share more details.

We want the Opposition to succeed in turning Malaysia around for the better.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [6](#) · [4 February 2014 at 14:59](#)

y

115.

 funny eh

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [29 January 2014 at 05:17](#)

y


116.

 Which part is so funny???

[Like](#) · [4](#) · [3 February 2014 at 14:18](#)

y


117.

 Despite many criticize her video I believe this is an effective propaganda tool. It is easier to send out political message via satire scripts. Rather than using serious stuffs that usually boring and would not catch your targeted audience attention.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [4 February 2014 at 04:04](#)

x


118.


<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=685014501538324&set=a.680401731999601.1073741827.659032400803201&type=1&theater>

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [2 February 2014 at 07:39](#)

y/n


119.

 This satire video is good for the suffering Rakyat, but certainly inappropriate for CNY YB.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [15 February 2014 at 07:51](#)

n


120.

 Don't you have other better things to do as a Parliamentarian? Why don't you focus on constructive policy rather than making jokes of others in a Celebrative occasion?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [13 February 2014 at 17:33](#)

n

121.

 Don't feel this is the right way to win public support.












[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [12 February 2014 at 21:05](#)

y

122.

 To our sister in christ from SFX...we are with you all the way.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [11 February 2014 at 00:08](#)

- d 123.  why malay dont have any sense of humor?..should laugh if they understand the message..i dont understand that is why i dont laugh..catch no ball..Kong Hee Fatt Choy to all whporessssssss as BBC misinterpret the year of the horse..i laugh at that hahah hoo ho <http://www.mirror.co.uk/.../chinese-new-year-2014-bbc...>
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · 10 February 2014 at 15:44
- d 124.  Ya only tell truth also kena samAn
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · 6 February 2014 at 18:44
- n 125.  Sorry, not my taste. actually quite disappointed in some aspects.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · 5 February 2014 at 15:42
- ss 126.  [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · 5 February 2014 at 02:18
- y 127.  It is nice to remind our people with sense of humor...
But some will take the opportunity to attack back... But then, good job...
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · 4 February 2014 at 20:36
- y 128.  Its indeed a very good production.. Its not just a video clip.. This is the Right & the Voice from most of the Malaysian..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · 4 February 2014 at 05:49
- y 129.  CNY is great fun and be merry. This video clips just hit the right notes. It's way better then many of the CNY movie which sucks. I find that our local govt simply can't take humor in it. They were simply offended bcoz its partly fact. If u guys here can't find it humour in this clips, coz u r behind news. Sad..some people can't take a lashing... Just like some American Idol hopefuls.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · 4 February 2014 at 04:02
- x 130.  This is malaysian politics....
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · 4 February 2014 at 02:34
- x 131.  A Happy Chinese New Year to all no matter what ideology that u are upholding. Enjoy ur CNY with your loved one...
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · 4 February 2014 at 01:50
- d 132.  Anyway , my vote in seputeh still goes to her haha
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · 4 February 2014 at 00:45
- y 133.  Very Good video, I shared to thousand friends.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · 3 February 2014 at 01:15

d

134.



some people cannot produce tis fantastic idea ,then try to su it,cheap skate

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [2 February 2014 at 23:08](#)

y

135.

OMG YB Teresa can definitely qualify for next years golden HORSE award!!! We love you, YB!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [29 January 2014 at 04:51](#)

y

136.

Onderful..

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [28 January 2014 at 21:50](#)

y

137.

creatively done

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2](#) · [28 January 2014 at 17:59](#)

y

138.



See nice

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [28 January 2014 at 17:45](#)

y

139.

super likes..

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [28 January 2014 at 17:04](#)

y

140.



Uber good one! Well done, YB!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 22:34](#)

y

141.



Kong Hee Fatt Choy YB... Good message to ALL

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 17:12](#)

y

142.

My Chinese is not so good yet I found this to be humorous and entertaining.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3 February 2014 at 08:10](#)

ss

143.

share this

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 03:32](#)

ss

144.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 16:29](#)

y

145.

Awesome!


[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [30 January 2014 at 04:35](#)


y

146.

Like !


[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 13:15](#)

- n 147.
[REDACTED] Will never appear in national tv!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 12:32
- ss 148.
[REDACTED] Hahaha
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 00:03
- b 149.
[REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 16:56
- y 150.
[REDACTED] 25, hahahaha
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 16:51 · [Edited](#)
- ss 151.

[REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 26 February 2014 at 02:59
- y 152.
[REDACTED] Nice video, your team not only focus on work but also entertainment to the community.
Balance of work & life.
Thanks for the true good laugh.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 18 February 2014 at 12:33 · [Edited](#)
- y 153.
[REDACTED] Looking Forward for Chap Go Meh maaa..
Most Bad and Ugly Ladies in Msia on air..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 13 February 2014 at 16:17
- ss 154.
[REDACTED] ..here is it
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 12 February 2014 at 10:29
- ss 155.
[REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 12 February 2014 at 01:47
- n 156.
[REDACTED] The Pen is mightier than the Sword.Your Vote counts!Get your Parliamentarian to address issues that are detrimental to the Country.Address problems,discrimination...corruption etc.
Their job is to represent our needs.What is their mandate?When they ask for our vote did they not promise to address..rectify our demands.
They have the right to propose,plan,discuss ,amend legislation that is fair and beneficial to all and benefit all Malaysians irregardless of race,religion...
If members in the Dewan Raakyat don't bring up issues and resolve problems through Legislation than change won't happen!
Complaining to your family,friends,colleagues or media is a waste of time.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 11 February 2014 at 21:30

- ss 157.
[REDACTED] watch this..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [11 February 2014 at 20:15](#)
- d 158.
[REDACTED] God is great. No worries. They who know they did wrong will suffer
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [11 February 2014 at 05:37](#)
- d 159. 
[REDACTED] YB we will always support you!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [9 February 2014 at 06:59](#)
- ? 160.
[REDACTED] We are the world.
Human thinking makes people become racist.
But heart will makes people united.





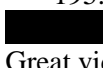
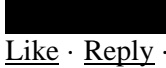
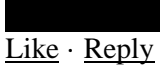


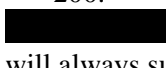
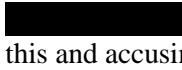
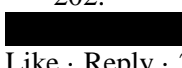
Only wise man learn a failures of the past history to make a better future.














Malaysia tak mungkin bersatu padu jika masyarakat berpendidikan cetek dengan pemikiran sendiri dan tidak bertolak ansur demi keamanan sesama sendiri dan negara.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [8 February 2014 at 21:00](#) · [Edited](#)
- ss 161.
[REDACTED] finally XD
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [8 February 2014 at 01:24](#)
- x 162.
[REDACTED] You people are so ungrateful..only in Malaysia used to b TANAH MELAYU...can allow other races to rule d country...put ur feet on d ground not ur head in d cloud.... HIDUP MELAYU...
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [7 February 2014 at 19:30](#)
- y 163.
[REDACTED] YB, I won't say u r wrong as u r d best performer in d last election, just keep it strong and dun let d critics weaken u. It shows d hatred is mounting on them and d message is clear enough.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [7 February 2014 at 10:54](#)
- d 164.
[REDACTED] Fara May,i dont see any malay insulting in her video. show me pls if u felt insulted.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [6 February 2014 at 21:34](#)
- x 165.
[REDACTED] anyone who can help Malaysian? Help Help Help Please
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [6 February 2014 at 04:07](#)
- ss 166.
[REDACTED] must watch..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [6 February 2014 at 00:17](#)
- y
[REDACTED] GOOD JOB !!!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [4 February 2014 at 21:36](#)














- y 167.
[REDACTED] True at all!...hahahah..I found this amusing...!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 February 2014 at 21:25
- x 168.
[REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · 4 February 2014 at 20:37
- y 169. 
[REDACTED] fun video with need some improvement on the script writing for more positive & suggestive!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 February 2014 at 12:13
- y 170.
[REDACTED] very entertaining film for chinese new year of horse , with truth problem, we , malaysian are very good and creative, DAP.....UBAH,
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 4 February 2014 at 02:04
- y 171.
[REDACTED] Yb, support you 100% , salute you
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 2 February 2014 at 22:50
- n 172.
[REDACTED] Politicians and actors are same the same , providing only brief entertainment and shallow relief to the masses whilst providing a boost to their own self serving egos and gain.YB here has double her capacity to entertain and bring relief. Maybe all politicians should follow this so as the country is further divided along community and racial lines and goes to the dogs, the masses are entertained as well and get double "value" from the politicians.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 31 January 2014 at 20:43
- n 173.
[REDACTED] Well put [REDACTED]. There's always a hope that politicians will one day be able to put their time and resources to better use.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 30 January 2014 at 17:16
- y 174.
[REDACTED] LMAO
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 30 January 2014 at 02:46
- y 175.
[REDACTED] Wonderful filming na..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 30 January 2014 at 00:30
- y 176.
[REDACTED] Laugh must laugh work must work also
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 29 January 2014 at 16:44
- y 177.
[REDACTED] I loved it. It's hilarious but true.
[REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 29 January 2014 at 15:14






- y 178.
[REDACTED] Well done YB! Wishing you all the best as you strive for the rakyat. May God be with you!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [29 January 2014 at 14:40](#)
- y 179.
[REDACTED] Nice one!!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [29 January 2014 at 07:44](#)
- y 180.
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Super creative. Well done! Our people need to be reminded on this as Brim is coming to town....
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [29 January 2014 at 07:42](#)
- ss 181.
[REDACTED] Thanks [REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 06:07](#)
- y 182.
[REDACTED] like it
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [29 January 2014 at 01:56](#)
- ss 183.
[REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 01:51](#)
- ss 184.
[REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [29 January 2014 at 01:25](#)
- ss 185.
[REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [29 January 2014 at 01:25](#)
- y 186.















[REDACTED] Got the best laugh of the year
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [29 January 2014 at 00:58](#)
- y 187.
[REDACTED] Good!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 23:17](#)
- y 188.
[REDACTED] I like!!!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [28 January 2014 at 22:48](#)
- ss 189.
[REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [28 January 2014 at 22:18](#)
- y 190.
[REDACTED] nice wan
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 21:18](#)



- y
191. 
Double tumb up for u.....
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 19:51
- y
192. 
Kong Hei Fatt Choy and keep the good effort!!.... This one is hilarious!!....
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 28 January 2014 at 18:53
- y
193. 
good show..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 18:39
- y
194. 
i like this video... thanks yb for fighting for the people's right
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 28 January 2014 at 18:30
- y
195. 
Happy CNY YB...
Great video...
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 28 January 2014 at 17:14
- y
196. 
Well done maam. Sound advice. Lol. I laughed so much
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 16:32
- b
197. 
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 28 January 2014 at 16:25
- y
198. 
Very good comments of the Chinese New Year in Malaysia.
EVERYTHING GOES HIGH IN YEAR OF THE HORSE ON 2014. Ha! Ha! Please do do something about it.....
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 28 January 2014 at 16:17
- y
199. 
This film show truth facts on our Kangkung Land
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 3 · 8 February 2014 at 01:11
- y
200. 
Thank You YB Teresa Kok..great video clip & right to points..well done..we will always support U...have a great wonderful CNY ☆☆☆
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · 28 January 2014 at 17:01
- y
201. 
Nice parody. Why are your country's 'mini stars' getting so worked up over this and accusing her of sedition?
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · 4 February 2014 at 20:14 · Edited
- b
202. 
STP
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 27 February 2014 at 09:46



















- y 203. 
cant watch but I heard pretty witty! President of Philippines coming to negotiate on
educ for Mindanao migrant kids in Sabah, Islamic Movt this Thurs
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [26 February 2014 at 22:03](#)
- y 204. 
very creative
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [16 February 2014 at 00:08](#)
- y 205. 
Awesome Video.....
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [13 February 2014 at 17:22](#)
- y 206. 
quiet funny
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [13 February 2014 at 04:37](#)
- ss 207. 
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [13 February 2014 at 03:11](#)
- n 208. 
Don't you have better script?
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [12 February 2014 at 17:04](#)
- ss 209. 
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [12 February 2014 at 14:28](#)
- ss 210. 
here's the video
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [12 February 2014 at 02:28](#)
- ss 211. 
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [12 February 2014 at 00:12](#)
- y 212. 
happy CNY 2014 , good video clip is represent all malaysia people
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [11 February 2014 at 02:23](#)
- y 213. 
WE SUPPORT YOU!!!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1 · 9 February 2014 at 01:30](#)
- n 214. 
Politicians should just be fodder for satire not the satirists.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [8 February 2014 at 00:06](#)
- d 215. 
you do not like the truth told in a satirical way ?.... Or perhaps
you don't really understand the Cantonese?
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [7 February 2014 at 17:54](#)

- y 216.
 4K likes and 14,680 shares good result!!! Well done! We will support the true!!!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 7 February 2014 at 16:08
- y 217.
 very nice video..i will support all the way.. Thanks
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 7 February 2014 at 04:22
- y 218.
 Tq for the sub title! Hahahah
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 6 February 2014 at 03:15
- y 219.
 Bravo, bravo, bravo..I loved it. Now lets work to bring all the "pai ma wangsai" down..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 6 February 2014 at 02:50
- n 220.
 hoi.....stupid dun believe the oppositionlah.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 5 February 2014 at 18:49
- y 221.
 Nothing wrong about the video
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 5 February 2014 at 06:24
- y 222.
 I could understand all the languages/dialects from the video and find it perfectly good for All politician to learned that the peoples are watching and catches your speech and mustn't blame any one because the are merely repeating what had been spoken in lighter tone! Real story based. Good Try MB Teresa!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 5 February 2014 at 05:28
- y 223.
 I salute TK this round
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 5 February 2014 at 04:12
- ss 224.
 
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 5 February 2014 at 02:44
- n 225.
 The post shoot here and there will cause a stir.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 5 February 2014 at 01:50
- ? 226.
 <https://fbcdn-sphotos-g-a.akamaihd.net/.../1532068...>
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 4 February 2014 at 19:36
- x 227.
 Hapi Chinese New Year
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 February 2014 at 17:37

- y 228.
[REDACTED] Nice, really funny! Creatively created messages with humor makes it more fun.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [4 February 2014 at 15:10](#)
- y 229.
[REDACTED] This is really funny yet so insightful! We need some humour in our politics or else it will be boring
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [4 February 2014 at 12:53](#)
- y 230.
[REDACTED] The video clip is good.. but like the others have said, it's only promote more racial tensions bcoz the counterparts very sensitive about the issue being promoted and they will used it as their weapon.. i suggest open debate the best way like Lim Kit Siang have said. Gong Xi Fa Cai
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [4 February 2014 at 07:53](#)
- y 231.
[REDACTED] Yes its humorous but some parties dont think so..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [4 February 2014 at 04:06](#)
- y 232.
[REDACTED] Best clip!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [4 February 2014 at 02:12](#)
- y 233.
 [REDACTED] nice video =]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [3 February 2014 at 19:10](#)
- Yss 234.
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Really connected with Malaysians. Bravo! Teresa.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2 February 2014 at 23:30](#)
- x 235.
 [REDACTED] I think Unifi blocked the video, it loads all right on Maxis 4G. But on Unifi, all video load OK except this one. The same thing happens to the Kangkung report on BBC too.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2 February 2014 at 03:23](#)
- y 236.
 [REDACTED] Support u 100% YB
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [2 February 2014 at 02:10](#)
- y 237.
 [REDACTED] Criticizing & summarizing the story of the video? Come on..not all but not less among our citizen are mature enough to value the video. "Girl Just Want To Hv Fun"...well just tk it easy for this video!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1 February 2014 at 20:54](#)
- y 238.
 [REDACTED] Very nice!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1 February 2014 at 15:52](#)

- y 239. 
  Though I'm not a Malaysian, I enjoy it very much.
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [31 January 2014 at 14:15](#)
- y 240.  It is meant to be a funny comedy ! People, take it easy !...LOL, great laugh !
 Love it!
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [31 January 2014 at 12:11](#)
- y 241. 
  V are multicultural...never blamed others...may Malaysia always in
 peace...Happy new year
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [31 January 2014 at 07:24](#)
- y 242.  Awesome
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [31 January 2014 at 00:09](#)
- y 243.  I just want to like more!!!NICE!!!
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [30 January 2014 at 05:34](#)
- y 244.  Absolutely hilarious. Thank you Mdm Kok, and Happy New Year. I am sailing
 into the horse year with a chuckle.
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [30 January 2014 at 03:29](#)
- y 245.  creative
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 23:20](#)
- y 246.  Bravo ! [Teresa Kok](#) luv this video.
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 21:59](#)
- y 247.  This is really good, YB!!
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 21:02](#)
- y 248. 
  very witty and good show, well done
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 20:09](#)
- x 249.  Gong xi fa chai, Madam Kok
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 15:59](#)
- y 250. 
  Loving It!
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 15:51](#)
- y 251.  cool !
 [Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 14:40](#)

- y 252.
[REDACTED] Thumbs up Teresa
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 14:30
- y 253.
 [REDACTED] Clip should show in tv
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 12:17
- y 254.
[REDACTED] Amazing! A feat from Malaysia's unsung talent and a light hearted take on an extremely dire situation haunting Malaysia now and it's successes in the future
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 06:01
- y 255.
[REDACTED] Amazingly witty YB
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 04:24
- y 256.
[REDACTED] Very creative!!!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 02:48
- y 257.
[REDACTED] Wow! Hope that 'somebody' get the message!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 02:43
- y 258.
[REDACTED] OMG somebody must be coughing so badly now
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 02:32
- y 259.
[REDACTED] Thank you!!!!!!!!!!!!!! made my day!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 02:29
- y 260.
[REDACTED] Marvelous, YB.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 01:36
- y 261.
[REDACTED] Really a good punch back..onderful..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 00:32
- ss 262.
[REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 00:29
- y 263.
[REDACTED] good 1.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 00:18
- y 264.
 [REDACTED] nice one YB Teresa. once you retired from politics, you can become film director
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 00:16

- b 265.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 22:45](#)
- ss 266.
 ur favorite
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 22:40](#)
- y 267.

 Well done!!! Really had a good laugh...keep up the good work.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 22:36](#)
- y 268.

 Great one YB.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 22:36](#)
- b 269.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 20:52](#)
- y 270.

 Good video
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 20:44](#)
- x 271.

 we must work to wards a be tt er malaysia
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 20:30](#)
- x 272.
 Happy Chinese New Year..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 18:41](#)
- ss 273.


[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 18:26](#)
- y 274.
 WOW must watch
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 18:25](#)
- x 275.

 Happy Chinese New Year to YB Teresa Kok
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 18:23](#)
- x 276.
 wishes Yb as well..happy cny ahead to Putrajaya..gong xi fa cai
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 18:11](#)
- y 277.
 Absolutely well done! Very enjoyable! Thanks for sharing!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 17:57](#)

- y 278.
 yeah, clap clap.... so true
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 17:37
- y 279.

 Cool~~~
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 17:37
- y 280.



 Well done happy c.n.y
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 17:34
- y 281.
 entertaining!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 17:33
- y 282.

 like x100
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 17:15
- y 283.
 Ha ha so wonderful..happy horse year.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 16:57
- y 284.

 wonderful!!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 16:44
- y 285.

 GOOD
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 16:36
- y 286.

 sogood
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 16:35
- y 287.
 Good one
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 16:34
- y 288.
 funny
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 15:41
- ? 289.
 This is actor joker of Malaysia??
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 29 January 2014 at 08:55 · [Edited](#)
- x 290.
 Blessings from rakyat YB..
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 28 January 2014 at 16:35

- y
291. 
[REDACTED] Good one
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 16:11](#)
- y
292. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] True story /\
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [7 February 2014 at 01:01](#)
- x
293. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Happy Chinese New Year...to all Malaysians....
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [4 February 2014 at 16:44](#)
- y
294. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Her's Sarcasm makes other still sleeping people awaken !!! Should thanks her !
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [5 February 2014 at 17:27](#)
- y
295. 
[REDACTED] yeahhhhh
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 05:17](#)
- y
296. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Happy new year to you too YB!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 17:44](#)
- y
297. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] hahaha.... funny !! funny!!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [28 January 2014 at 17:16](#)
- y
298. 
[REDACTED] Just a mere political satire. So, what's d fuzz all about. Grow up-lah & stop being childish, Bad News macai.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [7 February 2014 at 05:34](#)
- y
299. 
[REDACTED] nice
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [29 January 2014 at 09:44](#)
- n
300. 
[REDACTED], sure i understand. I don't think this video is appropriate.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [10 February 2014 at 06:18](#)
- ss
301. [REDACTED]
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [10 February 2014 at 03:59](#)
- y
302. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] funny video!
like this very much!!!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [10 February 2014 at 03:43](#)

Appendix: Teresa Kok - Interview

Interview with Teresa Kok: 18 October 2014 at the DAP Seputeh Service Center, KUALA LUMPUR

Below is a selective transcription of the interview with Ms Teresa Kok at her office. The interview lasted more than 1 ½ hours, including interruptions by her staff, as well as periods of silence when she showed YouTube videos to the interviewer. These and some casual conversations have been excluded as the interview is analysed only for content, rather than for the discourse. Grammatical errors are left uncorrected to reflect the spoken nature of this dialogue.

Key: I = Interviewer T=Teresa Kok

Para. 05:40

1. I: We see in the media things are very tensed between the Opposition and BN. How is it like in your day to day working with your BN colleagues?

2. T: If in parliament, OK lah. You see, ah, no matter how you quarrel or what, in parliament one year we meet for about four months, you want this four months we don't talk to each other ah? Can't, isn't it? You sure will talk. You quarrel quarrel in chamber, you go to canteen, parliament is so small you still bump into each other. And then a lot of times, you know, this mad fellow...they are jokers lah, for me lah, you still talk to each other. It's ok. It won't come to the extent we punch each other's face....the most is you don't talk lah. I would think that it is OK. A lot of time there are things like Perkasa started to have the anti-Allah issue or when my video clip thing ah those certain jokers come for demonstration, all these are instigated. All these are paid to do the job. So as long as I know there are people behind to instigate ah I think our country can be very peaceful.

06:54

3. I: you use Facebook quite a lot, right? Why did you choose Facebook?

4. T: Everybody use Facebook wat.

5. I: Everybody? Really?
6. T: Most politicians use Facebook.
7. I: You use humour quite a bit as well, right?
8. T: Ya, when I have time I sit down and write something. Like this morning we gave away some...the Selangor state government ah, for the deceased ah, Selangorian passed away but who are KL people. We give a sumbangan, if I have time I'll sit down and write something lor. But a lot of time I don't have time, then I don't write. So sometimes when there are fun things we do put on Facebook
9. I: Are you quite unique in terms of using fun things. The others seem to be very serious.
08:14
10. T: I hardly ever go and check other people's Facebook. But I must say that, ever since that *ONEderful* Malaysia that video clip ah, I noticed that my FB followers, the Likes have increased a lot. Initially, mine was about 36 thousand. So after that, because I fight back, I continued to fight back when all the attack comes and I put in other people's thing you can see that, this one Elizabeth Wong because she created some controversy by putting the beer drinking photo with me...that's why I come in...so, I looked at hers only 34 thousand...you mine ah, mine is 112, 460. So I think mine, together with Tony Pua, because of the area that we stay, English educated and so on, lots of those followers. But my friend told me that somehow mine have compared to other politicians, there are most comments made in many of my post. Maybe I show you some. There are times when they come up to thousand. Depends on how controversial. Like this one, I'm going to ban some jokers. [Name] You see like 197 comments. This one are my boring stuff, my parliament speech, no body read. This one, let see....I talk about Najib, normally a lot. Esecpecially I just put it there what is your view, wah, that one ah, I tell you normally it will come up with a lot. A lot of comments. This one consider not so much. There are some especially anything to do with religion, anything to do with me whacking BN...the comment come up is like this one....controversial mah, Bung

Mokhtar say fair trials in china...shoot seditious people. 561. So like the one ah ...like this one. Like the one I put down yum sing ah. Controversial, right? 253 This one I you know? I on MalaysiaKini, I kena whack 291. I wrote so many shares 476. So my friend say that mine consider ah, a lot of people come in write something.

11:36

11. I: Do you find the comments helpful? Do you read them?
12. T: I do but there are times because most of the time I read from my iPad...from my iPad sometimes it will *PONG* go off wan you know? Then you will have to press and download again. Because I'm always on the move, so I always carry my iPad along, so I buy a big handbag, so my iPad can throw inside. So when I'm waiting for meal to serve me I check my iPad. When I'm in my car going to somewhere I check my iPad. So I do read lah, lots of the comments I do read la. That's why sometimes I found some ridiculous ones I either hide it or delete it. I dowan to get myself in trouble.
13. I: What do you mean ridiculous? What would the criteria be?
14. T: Like Shah Michael, use vulgar words, and run down the Chinese, stupid thing. It was struck off...er, whole thing, what you call that, the stream ah, the comments and criticism. When I dowan this I just delete ban him la. This is my original one, this is where they use and circulate around...513. So they all argue over my Facebook whether can drink or cannot drink. Muslim will say that I will not vote for you because you drink. [Laugh].
15. ...So why I do this? I know it's going to spark controversy because of Oktoberfest. I feel that I should make a stand lor. And not only me. You can see that many DAP leaders went, including Kit Siang. We went to make a stand, in a way we are defiant lah. All these mullahs, all these holier than thou people...you know, their statements. And also maybe because of that, that make a lot of people come to follow me. You see now, you look at this one. 559 share, this is what I wrote. I wrote about the thing, where they

share, they draw more people to draw more traffic to come to like my page, to follow my Facebook. That's why I see why my Facebook, the number increase.

16. I: Do you think it is your personal style? Probably you attract more interest?

17. T: Controversial

18. But others also controversial. Like Lim Kit Siang also has controversial...

19. You see ah, his controversial period already over. He's a Statesman now. He's 73 yo.

He's a statesman now. So the people who want to attack us, those who want to defame us. You look at Utusan Malaysia, and all that, they are the one, for me cari pasal, looking for trouble. Even when I was in Selangor, when I was an Exco, they go after me; they don't go after Kit Siang. You notice they don't go after Kit Siang, why you think they don't go after Kit Siang, they go after Lim Guan Eng, after me then Tony Pua. Like I'd been put under ISA. Charged under sedition. So they are like targeting certain people to be enemies of Islam and Malays. We are the extremist. So we have been...unfortunately I'm one of those. I fall into their trap. Or target lah. I become their target.

15:24

20. I: Are you afraid? Or used to it already?

21. T: Ya lah. So long, used to it already. Of course it is not easy lah...when you're a target. Your face come out on TV news. When you are under attack of all these UMNO jokers. Like the "*ONEderful* Malaysia", I never thought it would become so controversial. I never thought people will come here for demonstration.

22. I: They set fire to this place as well, right?

23. T: They throw the dead chicken. Actually, at the staircase, easier. Because here got CCTV. They come up, got CCTV. So they splash the red paint. Well, I must say that it made people worry about my safety lah. So for that one, two weeks, I dare not go for my exercise or jogging, you know, at the hill. And there are places that I go, Id' been advised not to go to the Malay area so that I won't face trouble. If there is some, what you call that, some sort of concern about my security. But it is over lah. You

know...after that....How long can they make noise? One month? Two months? They already drag it for one and a half months to attack me. Then other issues come in what. The missing MH370 and all that come in. Come in I thought the issue die down. I didn't expect them to charge me. In May then they charge me.

24. I: But this is also part of a blitz of sedition for a lot of people, right? You were one of the first ones this round right? Using the new sedition law?

25. T: Actually, I was one of the first. yah, because a lot of people shocked. Like this also seditious?

26. I: What are your views? Are they just bluffing? Just to cause trouble? Probably won't stick right?

27. T: For me lah, is that AG, he did this. He wanted to please Rosmah, so that he can get his term extended. And why I got myself into trouble? Because also related to her.

Otherwise, my whole video clip...nothing to do with Melayu, nothing to do with Islam, nothing to do with the royal family, royalty, why you target me? Sure be MCA that jumps. MCA when the video clip came out nobody dared to say anything. So it has to do with the fat lady in the video clip that make those people surround her hoo ha lah.

18:50

28. I: What will happen to those legal charges? Can they stand legally? Or is it just for show?

29. T: You know my lawyer, Datuk Param. OK lah Indian. He has to try to understand what was that all about? So I have to give him my English *translation*. I gave him my Bahasa one. He tried to watch a few times. Then he has to come back to me and say "I don't know what is so seditious of this tape". His feedback, his response tells you that there is nothing seditious there. The fact that I can be charged and all that shows that there is political manoeuvring on this matter

30. I: So how much confidence you have in the court

31. T: In normal circumstances the case should be thrown out what. But if you see now we already have three fellas being charged...I don't know whether you are aware or not, not DAP ah. We are organising a fund raising. Fund raising dinner. See these three, already being committed you know? Charged in court already, one year some more. Adam Adli. And then this one, I think ten months or what. So of course there is a concern lah. How confident are we of the judiciary now.
32. I: His speech is more under the normal kind of sedition. Compared to yours, yours is like
33. T: Exactly. Theirs is at least they have said something. Like for example, Adam Adli he basically said we should overthrow the Barisan Nasional government. After the last general election. But mine, it's satire. What's so seditious, you know?
34. I: So you are still not sure how fair the court will be. Generally, the courts are still reliable in non-political issues. Would you say that? Or depends on the judge?
35. T: You see, the problem is, this is what my lawyer told me. You know that we, they are trying to transfer my case, apply to transfer my case from the session court to the high court. Tian Chua also had done it but failed. But Karpal Singh one eh, the AG transferred from session court to high court and Karpal was convicted over the sultan thing. Why you want to transfer to high court? Because high court judges have higher standard or qualification, experience. You know in terms of civil service, the session judges are appointed by AG. They are same rank as the prosecution officers. So in a way, every session judge court wants to go for promotion, right? So they will be seen as they dare not make bold judgement.
36. You see, for in session court, if I am not happy with the judgement, the highest court, the level, I can go to is the Court of Appeal. And you know who can be appointed to the Court of Appeal. And some of the judges being appointed are questionable, you know, by Bar Council and others. Whereas if I am charged under High Court, if I am not happy with the judgement, I can appeal to Federal Court, the highest court. So this, that tells

you that...why put the sedition charges under session court at that level, is a bit worrying, especially you look at now three persons' names being convicted.

37. I: Why did you do it? You said you just did it for fun?

24:09

38. T: Ya, Did you know I've done it before? Are you aware? In 2013 election, I was the first one, come up. You type Teresa Kok in the YouTube. This is what I've done. Dare to Try This.

39. I: You can find time to do all this?

40. T: You have to have something new, mah. This is prior to general election. This is, basically election is coming. This is about Dare Try New Things. And this was widely liked, you know, by a lot of people, including the Chinese New Year. This is about one minute plus, only....it was watched by a lot of overseas Malaysians, because you can find out which country come...you see, we try to use this satire like that to convey a message. Chinese New Year, you ourselves want to look new, you want to change hairstyle, another one is about menu in the restaurant....So, you know that DAP come up with the Ubah Gangnam Style. In order to reach out to younger generation, young voters, we must try something that is familiar with them, something to make people laugh, from the laughter they can think, we can make them think of something, they can touch their heart, so that's why, you know, we do that. We spend some money, take some trouble to do that lah.

27:59

41. I: What do your Pakatan partners think of this?

42. T: Nobody cares. They don't do...in a way, they don't do all these funny stuff lah. They come up with their, the normal video lor. Like I think you have seen the media rakyat, and all that rather serious wan? We also, like, for DAP since [indistinct] selection we started to have ubah tv. You know about it? Anyway, got ceramah live where people can watch from compute. So we have done that lah. And also that Ubah Gangnam style. All

these are the new effort lah. And that Ubah Gangnam also have Rosmah wat. So, ah, but before that was, before election, and that Rosmah was [indistinct]...

43. Helper: Got three versions...

44. I: Somehow this one did not get to me....but your *ONEderful* one got to me.

45. T: That's because I got charged mah. Before that, that two quite popular, Also we target Chinese New Year, Chinese community, so unfortunately this one kena gau gau lah.

46. I: Does it reach beyond the Chinese voters?

47. T: Ya, of course, after they make it a big issue you know, you can see wah...the viewership goes up so much. The more they whack me on TV and Utusan, and all that, the more the Malays and other races come and watch. They make me like overnight famous lah. So they make me known lah.

34:36

48. T: That's why there is great injustice. I can only say that in other words, they also make me more well known lor. They accuse me for undermining the soldiers in Lahad Datu. I run them down...blah blah blah, stupid thing. Nothing to do with that, right? So most Sabahan go to watch [laugh]. So when I go to Sabah...it comes out so many times on TV news, ah. About me. All the protest and all that. Now I go to Sabah, go to interior area...you know, interior area they don't read newspapers, they can't access to Internet, and so on. When they say Teresa Kok they know lah [laugh]. So..you know we are trying to make headway into interior area, then my contact, you know, down there – Keningau, all that, go to kampong. When I go there they insisted I must go there. I must go there and talk to the people there because they recognise me.

49. I: Is it they show the video to them?

50. T: No, because in interior area, they still able to watch TV, see. Like, I tell you two months ago I went to Belaga, Sarawak...SOOO ulu aiyo. I stay in hotel there. For us it's budget hotel. Even cheaper than budget hotel type lah. That's the only hotel you can get. There I look at the TV then I pressed the button there, can you imagine, I can only watch

TV1, RTM 1 and 2. Even that, also quite blur. TV3 can't watch at all. So you want people in Belaga to know me, as long as I appear in RTM 1 & 2 news, they know lah. They know that there is one person named Teresa Kok lah. So when...ah, so I can only say that like in parliament I whack the BN side, I say, the only...all your false accusation, you are making me more known when I go to Sabah. And then after that they ban me from entering Sabah and Sarawak. I didn't say anything about Sarawak. So they ban me together with Rafizi, SAIFUDDIN Nasution, and others. So in a way, they see me as a threat....I don't know what sort of strategy they use...I think they are mad. I don't know what else to describe them but I can only say that they are mad [Laugh]. Ya, ya, ya. Actually, they don't have strategy. They don't have a coordinated approach on certain things ah. Like my video clip, they should just ignore it. Nobody watch. I mean those who watch, only those in urban areas. You want the Kadazans, the Malays, the Ibans, go to watch the clip, no way! It doesn't draw their interest into things like this. But when I become a target, wow, all sorts of demonstration, 300 over police report lodged against me, everyone will go to watch lah. Chinese new year, especially, very few government functions, so when this fellows they created all these hoohah during Chinese New Year time, so everybody is going to watch lah. Do you know that when I was...what you call that...because of 300 over police reports lodged against me, I also lodge police report against them, so I'd been called for statements ah. I'd been asked to give statements to police. In the end the police officer that watched my thing and all that also said that there's nothing for them to like...no criminal element, you know? They also hinted that they will recommend that those fellows that created the chaos, threaten to slap me, splash chicken blood over my photo, Kit Siang, Guan Eng photo all that ah. They recommend that they be charged. But in the end, what happened is the other way round. They are spared, I'm charged. So what sort of strategy? That shows to the world that there is no standard. You just charge according to political affiliation, and in a way your whole judicial system or agency being...what you call that?...politicised ah?...or

controlled, influenced by politicians, of those who are in power. What does this tell you? So for me, I look at what's happening in Malaysia now is that there is no direction. What sort of direction? If you can spare Ibrahim Ali. They talk about 1Malaysia. They don't shout the slogan 1Malaysia anymore.

51. Actually, after last GE. I think the more you can see that Najib had lost direction. They don't know what they are doing. He let whoever who wants to show this and that just go ahead. You can see that they go and blow up all the small things, like that sex blogger. These two jokers, just because they eat bakuteh and selamat hari...selamat berbuka puasa. It's not seditious. You can see that it is offensive lah. To the Muslim lah. But just that only. Why you charge these two? And put them in lockup for one week some more. And other things like they go and put that dog trainer, that lady: selamat hari raya with a dog. That is also offensive to Muslim. Charge that woman and that woman is Muslim. Because they thought that is a Chinese woman. So you...for me, that's why I always, you know, say in my ceramah, I think our country has lost direction, we are like that MH370, the pilot has lost contact with the ground. We don't know where the aeroplane is flying now. Including they charging me, is also one of those lah. And after that series of activists, academics, all that being charged. What does that tell you? What do we want to tell the world?...they just want to, like, revenge, they just want to revenge against the Chinese, they want to, you know, ah,...I don't know what they want to do, also. On one hand they want the Chinese vote, on the other hand they want to keep throwing out their anger, frustration, to the urban folks, the Chinese people, to the Christians, then they keep allowing those jokers to play up the religious fire, which is very something very dangerous. And after that they don't know how to handle Sabah Sarawak, the Christians in the interior areas, they are also bumiputra. They call God as Allah. Jam. It's like haywire you know?...you look at them, no standard, no basis, do what they like. They put the foot into the mouth. But unfortunately you can see that when UMNO going towards the extreme on race and religious issues, it affects the Malay ground, it affects

PAS also. The whole PAS is split over the Menteri Besar Selangor issue. So in a way it is sad. In a way, whatever being played up ah, it still have an impact on the Malay ground.

52. I: So it is not a reflection but somebody making it into reality.

53. T: Yup, yup, yup.

43:48

54. T: Can you imagine it affects PAS leadership's thinking? Because when UMNO start playing with all the religious and race issues ah, in the Malay rural area, Malay heartland, their opponent is PAS. So in a way then the PAS people also drawn into it. The hudud is no more a PAS issue now. It's all UMNO, it's Malay and Muslim ground issue. Because some days...they think by playing with all these issues can unite the Malays ah. To support either UMNO or PAS, so they go and play this. So it's sad lah, you know. You look at the country's direction.

44:46

55. I: You don't feel discourage?

56. T: No, I'm working very hard now on East Malaysia interior areas, I not only...for my party, also for my NGO called Borneo Care. When people are doing all the negative things, be it UMNO or PAS I believe that the more we should do positive things. We explore into the area that we never explore before. If next round we can't make it, you know, can't win their hearts and minds, can't win more seats, it means that we continue to work on...the way they are running the country now, you know we've been continuously in deficit for 16 years ah, the country's budget is in deficit, we are going to go bankrupt one...I think our debt already come up...our official one is 57 per cent. All these go on ah, if we are Buddhist, we talk about karma lah, and Christian we talk about judgement [unclear]. We have to wait lor, you know. We can only continue to work on the positive things, constructive things. To make people aware how important, er, you know, for us to...to demand for transparency, to go for anti-corruption, for democracy,

and so on lah. So, and we need to work on the younger generation, that are the hope for the future. So, of course there is a mess in the Malay ground because of PAS having this dubious stand. Have to sort it out lah, the moderates and the mullahs have to sort out the party's stand. Let them be lah.

47:30

57. I: Because you are an MP. You actually have a platform to say things. Did you feel you had to resort to an alternative way to say these things because you are banging your head in parliament?
58. T: You can see that last year, when I did this, everybody like it. Especially the Chinese, besides just now that hairstylist, another one is a menu. You can type my name you can find out. Nobody criticise me. Nobody say it is no good, why you MP go to do the acting? But this year become an issue, it's because they play up the issue to go against me because the fat lady doesn't like it. The fat lady.
59. I: Is it her or her people?
60. T: You want to know the truth, it is her lah. Otherwise, you think she got so many supporters that bother to do all this ah demo against me....my information is from the higher up, that's why...at first I didn't know. At first I was thinking, eh, we also have done the Oppa Gangnam style, all that, you know. Also you have a shot, some scenes about her why is she so sensitive? Then Tony Pua said because it was election. You can't do much. This one is I think after election, and they want to, I think also, we believe there are some Barisan Nasional Chinese politicians go to *cucuk* ah. Add pepper and salt and all that lah. That's how spark off the one who is really in power, you know, her anger lah. If there is no such reaction my video clip is merely a video clip only. You see, like, you want to reach out to younger generation your traditional style of *ceramah* might not work wan. Nowadays young people go where? They go to the net. Even us, you know, while we are in meeting or what we also look at our Whatsapp lah, try to reply the email, or sms. We are always on the phone, always on the net. So, in what way

to pass the message in an effective way? It's no more the traditional...your ceramah stand on the lorry or the...you go and try now, no one will come and listen to you except election campaign time. How to reach out to the younger generation? How to do something that, you know, people will laugh and then people get the meaning? It's from political satire. I believe nowadays ah many of us always got from Whatsapp, those video clip, isn't it? Either speeches, either jokes, either some meaningful thing, from the 2 minutes, 3 minutes thing circulating around. Even like certain message like...the Belaga, the conversion six thousand ringgit to convert one Christian ah to be Muslim. That one was SO widely spread, you know? It's all through the handphone, mobile phone nowadays. So mine can fit into the mobile phone. Can actually watch from mobile phone, from YouTube and all that. So, for me I did it for fun, I did it also to convey a message...how ridiculous is our country now, from corruption, from security issue, from inflation. All these are in the message. So you can see, you might comment that it is not up to the standard all that. Let it be lah, you know. It's not up to a mark, ah, the professional type of a parody. But it's an effort lah. To bring out certain message ah during Chinese New Year..

51:46

61. I: It was very well done. Who helped you?
62. T: Actually all these are professionals. They are part time but professional actors and actresses. Actually, they are...I must tell you that there are people who think it is really improper because it becomes a controversy, so it is improper lah. Then you have those Christian pastors say that how can you, you know, er, highlight those Feng Shui masters, against the Christian beliefs, you know? You promote this. Ei, for me ah, you ask me ah my frank view is that erm, I don't think there is anything wrong. I'm not promoting the Feng Shui master. I'm just using that role to convey that message. Because, I don't know whether you are aware, Chinese New Year do you come back home? You always see, you switch on the TV3 or whatever channel, always got Feng Shui, got prediction of the

year and all that. It is by using that concept, you know, that bring out a series of the country's issues, you know, from their mouth, you know, like for example, like, this year shouldn't wear yellow ah. You wear yellow ah you get yourself into trouble. Can you imagine in court ah, this is one of the charges against me. Seditious. Ask people not to wear yellow colour is seditious. They really come to the point they don't know how to handle that video clip simply go and *taruh*. Ah, another...I don't know whether you read my, I think you should read that there is one posting that I put on my website the charges against me. I don't know whether you read that? You pick out that one, they actually don't know how to handle me. They know that I have offended Rosmah. But if ah they put it that way that I offended the prime minister's wife it's more ridiculous. Then Rosmah has to go appear in court. [Laugh] So they have to crack their head to think up the seditious part. The other part is about tourism. Oh, this is Visit Malaysia Year. So if you want to visit Malaysia then you should go to Sabah, see the gun shooting, see the kidnapping. It's true wat. This one really happening wat. So, and ah, one of the charges is about that, you know. It is that part lah. So, actually, I don't know how are they going to proceed in court ah. Whatever the, the, the, about bloodshed in the Bersih, which is fact, the gun shooting, kidnapping, which is fact. You know the day I was being charged in court another Chinaman being kidnapped, you know? In the Sipadan there. Semporna there. So I'm telling the truth wat. Another one is the sell Chinese society lah. Sell Chinese organisation lah. That one is really up to you to interpret lah. You can be a traitor and all that. Up to you lah. You think that it is MCA, it is MCA lah. If you don't think it is MCA, it is one of those Chinese association lah that you can think of lah. It's parody. So what so, what's so ah, you know, seditious about that? So you ask me lah you know. When I...you know when I was standing at the dock and I heard them, heard the clerk read out the charges I felt like laughing. I was like, [whisper] "Is this seditious"?

63. It's ridiculous. They just want to make it difficult only. They just want to revenge on behalf of Rosmah only. That also show you how ridiculous our prosecution department become lah. Can spare Ibrahim Ali and can charge me ah.
- 55:45
64. I: I want the spontaneous, ordinary people. Yours was a bit unusual because you are an MP.
65. T: Then it come back to ah...if the MP go to the coffee shop or drink at the market place, talk to people...you know, MP job is supposed to connect with the ground, you know, it's supposed to be the voice of the people, that, to, to, in the parliament. By doing that actually it's one of the channel of reaching out. The same goes to Facebook. That's why you ask me whether I read. I read. But sometimes when there are just too many, when it comes to thousand comments ah, I find it difficult to, go to the latest and all that because it's just too much. I do read because from there you know lah. People will scold you. Ah, there are people who bring up other things, then you know the trend of thought of people, you know. So there are things ah, like...me in politics we think in that way. Sometimes the ground, you find that there are certain things that are so controversial like go to Oktoberfest. You'll be shocked to read some of the Malays ah, their comments you know. But this is a feedback to me. You can see how racist some of our Chinese Facebookers are. I mean all these are something for me to learn about, you know, the reaction of the public, especially the young. For me it's like, I don't see myself as so high up that I can't act...ah, the MCA, ah there's one MCA [not clear] say that I lower my status by playing the acting role. So what? Najib, this parliament sitting, budget time...wah, full of, you know, all that, he doesn't need to read, you know? Doesn't need to conventional style reading. Why? There are two reflection thing ah, he can just...ah, prompter?...Ah, prompter. His hand can move, like so, full of expression. UMNO assembly time, wah, so dramatic some more, before and after the general election. You can see how UMNO you should be united...so I was looking at him. Isn't he acting ah?

You know he can talk until some of the UMNO wanita members want to cry at down there. For me, wah, your acting very well ah. Right or not? When you say acting? Everybody is acting.

58:56

66. I: The other side no humour? The BN side.

67. T: It takes people, it takes time to write the script. It takes time to think of something to make fun of us ah. They do you know. After we come out of...I don't know whether you are aware of that nasi lemak, that nasi lemak 2020. This is by some of our supporters..OK, Namwee is one of those, but not nasi lemak lah. Namwee has always come up with all these to whack the government [pause to search for video, show video]

01:07:58

68. T: So, you can see from this nasi lemak 2020...it started if I'm not mistaken lah, it started from that Bersih, you know. I don't know whether you've seen the shaolin, er, that shaolin..少林足球 ah. I don't know whether your, your...you want to include all these. If I'm not mistaken it started from there, or started from that [not clear]. After that BN also started to follow. BN follow that by coming with theirs ngo jo jing fu, to whack us one. They also use movie. They take out certain parts and ah...

69. I: These are by MCA?

70. T: Either MCA or BN side.....I just show you in the end, also from Chow Sing Chee...That time this came out it was Bersih 2.0. where the govt wants to clamp down on Bersih ah. So people are scared. People are wondering whether to go for Bersih rally or not. And ah but for my party stand is you should go. You know, the more they clamp down, they even talk about sending army you know. Station at the MU campus or what ah, and ah is the under emergency kind of atmosphere. Then you have this one come out, it become SO popular, it circulate everywhere, handphone, in the Facebook...all these are circulated by Facebook wan. So, it shows that Chow Sing Chee goes everywhere to

tell people to join Bersih. This is Shaolin Soccer, that movie....[end of video]. So this is also something that is spread through Facebook. In a way I am just telling you is this is not a new thing. It has been a series of this thing. In Bahasa it's the Effin Show. Then in ah, you know, the Chinese one there are actually more.

71. I: I don't read Chinese.
72. T: If you want to do this topic, you have to go through some of those...I don't know, whether you want to interview some of them or not. Then you have to show to your lecturer, your supervisor
73. So come back to...you know 20 per cent of last election 2013 voters, they are the first time voters. I think 1.3 million if I am not mistaken. First time voters. So you want to reach out. Our future is on the young, you know. Like our age, ah, people like us ah, we some sort we are already fixed on our, on who we want to vote or choose. But it's the younger generation. Things like this is something that we see in the movie or we put in the current context. At that time you know you read the papers there was one month you know there was warning and warning not to go for Bersih 2.0 rally. So if this come up...I think you should look at the hit ah...668000. But this one doesn't include those who Share. And they also come up with different what you call this ah...account ah. Everywhere. Especially when you put on Facebook ah it's actually more than that one you know because you don't need to come to YouTube account to watch this. So that's how the..effect lah.Impact lah. In actual fact my ONEdeful Malaysia, I must say that it is a bit long. 10 mins. 11 mins. Unless you want to watch like that lah. Otherwise, if discussion like that, the more, the better one, I look at the some of the comment is that what I did in last year, the hairstyle and also another one the menu ah, you can go back you type my name you can watch that one ah, also 1 point over minute. Where people share through mobile phone is even more effective. Then everybody talk about change, everybody talk about, oh, new year ah, we should have new hairstyle, new menu for the restaurant, everything new. So it will somehow go into ah the grass root people's mind.

What is important is the grass root wat. You and I come to university and all that we all know but it's the grass root coffeeshop talk where people show this and that, they all laugh you know when watching the YouTube clip eh through the Whatsapp you know to transfer. The impact is greater. So it is so stupid for them to publicise mine lah. [Laugh]. But I would think that, if you look at ah foreign countries, right? I don't know about New Zealand. But you look at the way they make fun of the queen, queen of England, the way they make fun of Obama. There are so many. There is no issue. Why come to Malaysia there is an issue? So that Effin Show, that two guys they said they were thinking to create one ah based on mine you know. My case, you know. But I don't know whether they have come up or not. But they have to tread carefully lah, you know because I'm being charged in court.

01:23:50

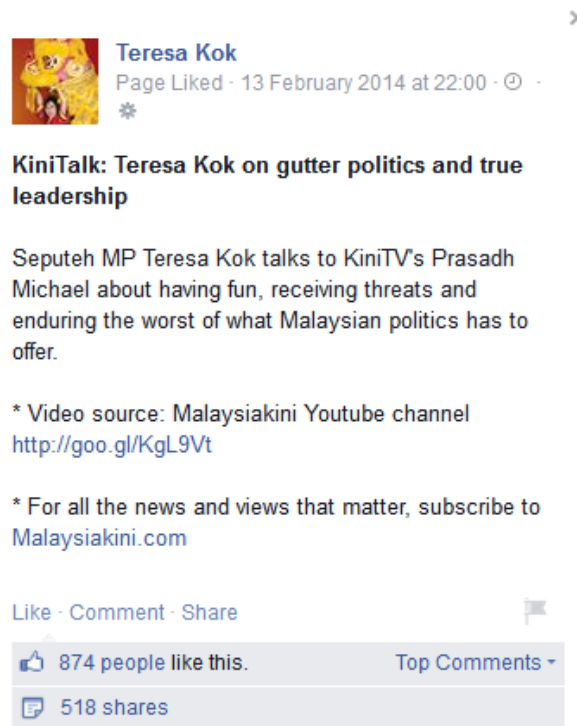
74. I: What is the worst that can happen in court?
75. T: Jail. Jail over that video clip ah. Aiyo. You know, there are, some of the human rights overseas organisation, you know some of them, they are from different nationalities, right? They came and watch. And they were wondering you know...they come and really ask me. I just don't understand you know. Why are you being charged over this? How do you want me to answer them? I can only say because they are mad. [Laugh]. I don't know what to answer, you know. They are so stupid in charging me in court. You can say you don't like it lah. Fine. You feel offended lah. You are from Barisan Nasional, you feel offended. But actually what is so offensive about it you know?
76. I: They want to show their power?
77. T: Yeah, they want to give a lesson to the Chinese, to the opposition. So if my video clip can be charged, we can't say a lot of things already. A lot of us can be charged for anything, including university professor. So you silence everybody. So I don't know what is their plan and...I would think...waiting for them to do more evil things.
78. I: Singapore also has similar like that now [charging people].

79. T: Actually, my little feel or sensing is the Singapore government also quite worried about Pakatan Rakyat. More than that...[worried about Anwar] I think in 2008 the change, the Ubah, in five states in Malaysia, you know in 2008, we only have in Sarawak, when we had change of government in Selangor, Sarawak ah, election we only won one seat, Kuching. The rest we all lost you know. So after that I think this waken up Sarawakian lah. Especially the urban people. Ha? That side already changed government ah? Our side only one seat ah? So then, our Ubah effect, a series of new things we introduced in Selangor, in Penang all that, had an impact in the Sarawak state election in 2011. So that's why first time we swept 15, Pakatan Rakyat took over, won in 15 state seats. Never before. Record breaking. Our ceramah and all that you know, hundreds and thousands of people coming you know. That is in 2011. So, then after the Sarawak state election then it was the Singapore election. We also can see Ubah there until Lee Hsien Loong had to apologise, you know, the government did not do enough, and PAP become a government that has won 60 per cent of the vote. Which is also, they lost, in a way, in terms of votes, they also lost quite badly, right? And what happened in Singapore, it has an impact after that in our by-election. Singapore election first then in [not clear] by-election. Because when Singapore election happen, a lot of Johorean go there you know to watch, to observe. Even my colleagues, the ADUN from Sarawak, they also flew to Singapore to observe the election. So it has become something that...What I'm trying to say is there is an Ubah that has an impact you know. It impacts Sarawak, Sarawak impacts Singapore, Singapore then impacts some of the by-election in Semenanjung, so for Singapore government, they are worried about us. Because they know that if one day if there is a change in government, PAP there is also not safe. And especially, I think a new breed of voters ah also emerge ah in Singapore they are quite anti-government wan. A bit like here....and I watch some of their ceramah, Singapore ceramah in Cantonese, no in Chinese ah, I watch it ah, a bit like our side here ah, wah, the way ah, young girl ah go to whack Lee Kuan Yew, whack Lee Hsien Loong. It's comparable...

80. [Note: Referring to Han Hui Hui, also charged]
81. So that's why it explains why Singapore government wary about us lah. Although, when Tan Sri Khalid went to Singapore, although he went to speak in a forum something like that. He didn't inform the Singapore government. Yet, the PMO invited him to go to meet LHL, and then after that LHL come out with a statement said that he'd met with Tan Sri Khalid. The same goes to LGE. LGE didn't go to see the PM. Yet the PMO invited him to have appointment with the PM. So on the one hand they are like want to engage us, on the other hand they also worry about the Ubah effect here would affect them.
- 01:30:17
82. I: I think they want to make friends, just in case there is a change in government...during the 2008 LKY came up here and met with different people.
83. T: Ya, met with Rosmah...met with Tan Sri Khalid, I think met with LGE, met with Nik Aziz. He went to Kelantan also...but then after that he wrote something very bad about Pakatan Rakyat lah, you know, in his book, isn't it? He thinks we can never take over Putrajaya and so on. That also reflect, OK, that also reflect his fear...the kind of parental control type of society lah.
84. [Discussion on Hudud, Chinese votes, PAS]
85. T: Enemies managed to enter

Appendix: Teresa Kok - KiniTV

This is the transcript of the video KiniTalk: Teresa Kok on gutter politics and true leadership posted on Teresa Kok's Facebook page on 13 February 2014. This clip can also be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4husJGyRJmI>



Key: P = Prasad Michael T= Teresa Kok

Paragraph no. & Dialogue	Division
1. P: So Teresa Kok, Seputeh MP and DAP vice-chairman, thank you for joining us. Now, there's a big controversy involving you right now. And there's [not clear] all these threats coming up to you. So basically, you've been an MP since 1999.	Brief bio-data
2. T: Yes	
3. P: And before that you were a political aide for five years for Lim Kit Siang.	

4. T: Yeah, for Lim Kit Siang. Yes.
5. P: So, in your experience, right, all this time you've been a politician how has things changed in Malaysian political landscape: fault finding landscape? Opinion about political
6. T: I think in...er...you see, I became MP in 1999 after that *Reformasi* or during that *Reformasi* time, so from that time until now what I have seen is that now, of course now we are in power in a few states. The, er...our opponent that is Barisan Nasional you see, they become very impatient, uneasy with us. They try their very best to find fault on us. If they fail to do it they will mobilise the NGOs, all their *kaki* from Perkasa to various NGOs to try to...er... convey a strong message, have demonstration, and, er...like now, the recent one is even to use, er...threaten to use violence against me. So I've...I find that...you know...this is a very unhealthy trend and something that the authority and the BN leaders themselves, they should speak up, they should stop their followers from doing so.
7. P: But do you think it's a rise in extremism or is it just that their voices are being heard more?
8. T: They want their voices to be heard more but they use that way and they always use the...still repeating that May 13 threat. I think this is wrong. And especially when the, you know, government set up NUCC to try to bring all races together, to promote racial unity. So if our government's leaders want to promote racial unity, all these cabinet ministers, they should speak up when they face their supporters, members do such things.

9. P: And you always somehow received threats and the last one was the 500 initially, then it went on to 1200 to physically assault. Personal threats
10. T: Yes
11. P: But...if...why you? Like, every time, somehow Teresa this, Teresa that. For threatening [?] groups.
12. T: In fact, this is the question that I'm interested to ask also. Reason for being the
Especially when I...er, you know...I become exco for Selangor target
state in year 2008, you know, the way Utusan Malaysia highlight
me and accuse me that I'm the real Menteri Besar, that it's now Tan
Sri Khalid and that I'm the woman that, you know, control him.
You know, the way they paint me like a very terrible racist woman
is something that I don't understand why I'm being picked. I can
only say that maybe first, they want to look for a DAP person, like
in the Selangor state government side is that...OK, somebody from
the DAP, because that time I was a senior exco: DAP, Teresa Kok,
they pick the woman, and also because I'm a Christian, also another
easy target. Something that, you know, Christianisation is the...all
the Muslims are afraid of. Then ah, woman, being woman,
Christian, and Chinese. Ah, Chinese will control Malays. Ah, this
is the line that they use in the *kampong* area. So that's why I become
the target.
13. P: And also as a very prominent woman in politics, do you think
that plays a part? The fact that that you're just the woman? Because
you don't see this happening to Gobind Singh, or Anthony Loke as
much.
14. T: Yeah, that's right. Why don't these people look for them?
[Laughter]

15. P: Do you think that's a factor? You being a woman?
16. T: Er...I...I try not to think so, but somehow it happen in that way.
And somehow that I become a target. Also maybe because when they hit me, when they whack me, and I, you know, retaliate, I rebut it, I retaliate, and I er...this make them, you know...become more hostile to me.
17. P: And being a politician in Malaysia, how do you keep going? Coping with political life
What do you tell your family? Do you fear for your safety? How is that going, in your house?
18. T: Actually, no. Ah...I always go back in a very optimistic manner so I share with my parents, my family members what happened in the...in the reality. Ah...what actually transpired from the news that they see, I tell them the real story behind, so um...when you say fearful, I'm not really fearful. So, even after the threat, you know, I still go, carry on my life as usual, go to attend function and so on. I think I have to just carry out my work. And I, I think that I, ah, you know, all eyes are watching on them. After they had made that threat
19. P: Yeah, and we understand that you have made, you've lodged a police report against that threat and right after that Home Minister Zahid Hamidi came up saying that it is not a threat. So was that disappointing to you?
20. T: Actually, I feel very disappointed with him as Home Minister The authorities' position
because er, after I received that death threat I discuss with my towards Kok
colleagues, we were thinking to write a letter to the Home Minister and the IGP, want to call on them and tell them that our concern, and I didn't expect two days later Zahid Hamid made the statement

“no need to investigate until he’s she’s being slapped or being, you know, ah, killed”. I think that is a Chinese paper. Ah, or, er, that is the threat that kill me. So I find that it’s very disappointing for the Home Minister to make such a remark and...ah...you know, at, at that time my feeling is: Look! These are the bunch of cabinet ministers that we have. I wish to take over and sit in their place. Maybe I can do a better job. [Laugh]

21. P: And also the Bar Council has condemned the inaction of the authorities. Do you think that more could have been done sooner? ‘Cause I think believe that even police were present at the time but they did not intervene with the protest...you think ah the authority should be a bit more pro-active?

22. T: This is not the first time we ah you know observed it. I remember a few years ago when a bunch of er...the Malay NGO, they carry the cow head, and had a demonstration outside the SUK, the Selangor State Government...er, the gate. The policemen were present there. Nobody stopped them. And, ah, this is second time when they did all this...ah, ah...what do you call that?...act...ah, against the opposition, er, elected rep, the leaders, and the police were present. And they did not do anything. Can you imagine? If it is Teresa Kok and the members that did this to the prime minister or any other cabinet minister, I think, er, if any policeman were there they will stop us and we’ll be hauled up to the police station. An investigation will be carried out. But now it looks like until today we still have not seen anyone of them although the press had reported their names and then had the video clip put on the...you

know, Internet but no action being taken. So I'm still waiting ah. I hope the police can act fast.

23. P: And also a cabinet minister Abdul Rahman Dahlan came out saying that you somehow deserved the backlash because the video was seen as, ah, actually insulting Muslims and Malays. So how do you respond to that?

24. T: I believe he did not watch my video clip. Even if he watched, he just try to jump into the band wagon of Zahid Hamidi to try to please the Peninsula Malaysia UMNO leaders that he is joining them, you know, to whack a DAP MP...ah, for me this guy is a...you know...I'm very disappointed with him ah. I thought after...from er, er...outspoken backbencher become minister, and especially he is from Sabah, he should sp..make statements that makes some sense ah. So I'm very disappointed.

25. P: And also, erm...basically the video was in Mandarin, so people could have been...assuming that they were confused by it, so how would you explain that video to people who didn't understand it? Target audience for video

26. Actually my target audience, originally, they are the urban folks who understand Cantonese and Mandarin, and the reason I put the English subtitles, are meant for those English educated Chinese so I didn't expect now the hit...what you call that? Hit, eh, has gone up so much and I was very surprised even the Sabahan and Sarawakian would tell me that they had watched it and now I go to walk in...that day I went to Mid Valley, young people from Sabah, Sarawak come to take photo with me...OK, now, that day I passed by that Gombak area, there is one Malay, horn his car "Teresa Kok, your video clip *bagus!*". So I didn't expect all this audience [laugh]

so in a way they have indirectly promoted my tape to a larger audience, ah...And people can see very clearly that there is no racial and religious slur in the subtitles, you know, and in the conversation in the video clip.

27. P: And also, ah going back, comparing this...'cause we, you have once sued Utusan and also, ah...it's with Chamil...er
- Lawsuit/freedom of expression/double standard

28. T: Chamil Wariya

29. P: Wariya!...for actually, a short story

30. T: ...the YBJ

31. P: Ya, which was actually a political satire, so some people say you have, ah, it's a double standard, you sued and now you are claiming that Malaysian should be able to express or create, ah, political satire. So how do you respond to that? How is it different?

32. T: The difference is, in my...er, Chinese New Year clip, I did not name names. I didn't mention the name of any politician. They are Feng Shui masters. So they talk from their perspectives, from the Feng Shui perspective. Ah, whereas Chamil Wariya, at the end of the story, is, I will be shot dead. That is a threat, a death threat imposed against me. Whereas on, on my side people just talk about...ah, ah, you know, issues faced by the nation, faced by the people, all these issues are people talk at the coffee shop. And, where they put in a lot of jokes and make fun of the issue so I would think the...whoever watch it knows this is a comedy, they should watch it in...er, they should have a sense of humour when they watch this clip.

33. P: So speaking about, like you say that the end of Utusan, er, story that you were shot dead...
34. T: Yup
35. P: ...but also going back to your video there were certain parts talking about shooting and reference to Sabah. So was it linked to the Lahad Datu...some people felt that you were sort of making fun of the situation. Intentions behind video
36. T: In fact ah, when I work with my, work on my script together with my colleague I never had the Lahad Datu incident in mind. I had a shock when Shafie Apdal said that I run down the soldiers, you know, did not appreciate their sacrifice in that Lahad Datu incidence, so it...it...it just doesn't make sense. You just try to highlight the security issue that face by the general public and also in Sabah particularly, so for the Visit Malaysia Year, how do we attract tourist to come when we do not, the government doesn't address the security issue, doesn't give assurance to the tourists, especially last year when the Taiwanese, er, lady being kidnapped for one month, and the husband being shot dead in the land of Sabah, so these are the real issues faced by, er, us. The government should ad...look at issues that we highlight and not, you know, twist and turn the theme of the video clip and run me down in a, in a lot of unsubstantiated er, you know, accusation.
37. P: So that in the video is not related to the Lahad Datu incident.
38. T: No, not at all. Never came across our mind.
39. P: So with the backlash would you produce another political satire maybe for Valentine's Day or Chap Goh Meh? Future videos
40. T: [Sigh] Chap Goh Meh is tomorrow, right? [Laugh]

41. P: Valentines' Day

42. T: Yeah, that's too soon. Ah...I'm not a professional actress. I'm not, you know, somebody that...who is in this industry...ah, I'm just interested to have some fun during Chinese New Year...er, do...create something that let people, you know, have...what you call that?...laugh at you. So, and now if you ask me, er, whether I'd do it again...well, let's see. But I would think that, you know, er, if I get myself into trouble over something that I did not name anybody, just highlight the issues faced by the nation, there will be a lot of comedians in Malaysia...outstanding comedians in Malaysia who imitate politicians, including me, that will be in trouble. So it is a kind of, infringe on the freedom of expression in the country. This is something that, you know, ah, for the government and the police to think twice if they want to take any kind of harsh action against me.

43. P: So do you think Malaysia isn't ready for political satire, do you think they don't understand how... Malaysians and satire

44. T: I think they are all ready. You see some of the comedians, we have to spend thousands of ringgit to invite them to give a performance of one hour or half an hour. People enjoy they imitate politicians, people enjoy they poke fun on the political issues but people are ready, the problem now is that...er...they are...some politicians not happy and they want to use...they are looking for issues to divert attention from the reali...political reality, issues faced by the nation and also faced by UMNO internally. They try to look for issues, look for enemies, look for target to divert attention of the Malay ground towards this issue so that they forget

about real issues that faced by the party, faced by Barisan Nasional, and faced by the nation.

45. P: 'K, we also posted a message on Facebook telling our viewers that we are interviewing you so that they could leave some questions. So we picked two questions from there.

46. T: Sure

47. P: One is from Naga Kavin. So he basically wants to know what is the motive of the video. Motive of the video

48. T: As I say just now, the motive of the video is Chinese New Year coming, let's have some fun. Ah, so that's why we highlight the social issues, er, political issues faced by the nation and we use a, the way the Feng Shui master analyse the fortune of the year, use the way they, they, they explain the fortune and Feng Shui to, to highlight all these issues. It's a political satire. It's just for people to have a laugh over it.

49. P: OK, and the second question is from MCA's Mary Yap. She wants to know why don't you just wish Chinese straight instead of making unnecessary video? Why choose to do satire?

50. T: Ya, at the end of my video clip we wish everybody to have a successful year, happy year, those who want to get married go to get married, those who are...ah...those are underemployed we hope, we wish them they can get their pay rise immediately...all the well...all the wishes are there.

51. P: But, I think, they want to know is, like usually, why not get straight to that instead of having, like pulling all like national issues...

52. T: That is boring!

53. P: [laugh]

54. T: As politicians, you know, people see us as always scold people Changing image
in the parliament, we scold in the *ceramah*, scold *Barisan Nasional*,
scold this and that. Come on, lah. Let's take away all these, ah, you
know, the rigid image and face. Let's have some fun. Let people,
you know, ah, look at the other side of the politician and let's have
a laugh over certain things that happen in our country.

55. P: OK.

56. T: I would think that those who disagree, the politicians that
disagree and criticise me over this, they...you know, I think they
lack a sense of humour. Look at the Internet. I've seen those video
clips that make, that comedian make fun of Obama, make fun of the
Royal Family of the British, you know? So, how come, you know,
in these countries people can accept it. And actually in reality we
have so many good quality...great sense of...comedians with great
sense of humour where people enjoy, so why not?

57. P: So you are calling on Malaysians to loosen up a bit and just enjoy
the laugh.

58. T: Actually, um, you mean...I should say in Bahasa, is that *siapa
makan cili dia rasa pedas*. Those who *rasa pedas*, you know,
cannot stand and turn...try to twist and turn the whole video
clip...um...make it look like something so controversial. This is
really out of my original attention. Intention, sorry.

59. P: OK, Teresa Kok thank you so much for joining us.

60. T: OK, OK, sure!

Appendix: Teresa Kok's "ONederful" Malaysia CNY 2014 Video: Subtitles

[This clip can also be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtsRcId70bk>]



Teresa Kok
Page Liked · 28 January 2014 ·  · 

Teresa Kok's "ONederful" Malaysia CNY 2014 Video

Dear friends, I present to you the
Cantonese/Mandarin (with English subtitles)
Chinese New Year 2014 video clip.

The filming took one day while the post production
took one week. I salute those who work in filming
and advertising industry as this industry is very time
consuming. I am thankful to each and everyone
who have helped me in the production of this
video clip.

This video clip is a political satire. The three Feng
Shui masters tell the "fortune" of Malaysia in the
Year of Horse. They tell you the Dos and Don'ts of
this year :-))

With special guest stars Ng Sze Han, Tiew Way
Keng and Loh Chee Heng.

Hope you enjoy it and please SHARE! 😊

For all my friends in FB, may all your dreams come
true. Let's work together for a better Malaysia. May
you have a blessed Year of Horse.

[This clip can also be seen at
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtsRcId70bk>]

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 You, Stanley Scholes, Kian
Ming and 5,080 others like this.

 17,111 shares

Key: T = Teresa Kok Y = Master Yan Yan J = Mrs JitW = Brother Wei

-
1. T: Ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to our special Chinese New Year Fortune Programme “*ONEderful*” Malaysia! Introduction of programme
 2. Let me tell you this Year of the Horse is really fantastic. Besides the usual Lucky Star, Unlucky Star and Quarrel Star there are also Star of Housing Price-hike, Star of petrol Price-hike, star of utilities price-hike and two very unusual stars, namely Simply-Hike Star and All prices-Hike Star as well. All these stars together form a very rare and huge year of the Horse.
 3. Today, we are very honoured to invite three prestigious guests to join us and share with us the fortune of our Huge Year of the Horse and share with us the fortune of our Huge Year of the Horse Introduction of guests
 4. First of all, I would like to introduce the man who likes to follow people’s back that are beneficial to him and also love to cry, Uncle Wai. Oops sorry, should be Brother Wai.
 5. W: Just call me Brother Wai
 6. T: Next is Mrs Jit, who specializes in stones and gems. Fashions and Feng Shui arrangement.
 7. And lastly, Master Yan Yan, who specializes in relationship Feng Shui for household arrangement and tourism
 8. Every citizen is complaining that “money is not enough to spend”. Three of you have any comments? Economy
 9. Y: You all need to wake up and listen to me! Why currency of Ringgit Malaysia slumps. Ma Bai, Ma Bai means luck also gone! We should call it Ringgit Ringgit, the sound of Ring Ring
 10. J: Ring, Ring, Ring, I love Ring

11. Actually, our country is very good, but still it is not easy to keep a family nowadays. Therefore, a wife must be smart in saving. For example, if your husband gives you RM100 to buy groceries at market you should only spend RM30 then you can save RM70 and put inside your pocket. IN the end, this “jimat, jimat” overtime, will accumulate
12. W&Y: ...into a mountain.
13. J: [creative sikit] becomes DIAMOND! According to Feng Shui, if you wear a lot of diamonds it will increase your wealth. The bigger the carat size, the better the fortune
14. T: What is your advice for those who wish to travel this year? Travel / security
15. Y: Listen to me. Visit Malaysia Year, where should we go? Of course travel to Malaysia! Do you know? Recently Malaysia was “awarded” as number 6 of the most dangerous countries in the world and it is the only country from Asia.
16. W: It is good to head north and south this year. So if you want to travel please bow to South and North pirates (highway). Leave your money to them they will ensure your safety all the way to your destination
17. Y: Or else, you can travel to Malacca and visit Jonker Street but be quick as it will be gone soon. Otherwise, you can travel to Sabah to see pirates, with bonus show of kidnapping and scenes of open fire...live performance, gonna be very exciting. Or else, let's go further down to Johor to see the murals painting “Beware! Robber is at the corner”. Very beautiful scenery.
18. W: Gone already, gone already.

19. Y: See! That's why you should go earlier! How sad that it is gone now!
20. T: Living in Malaysia is very unsafe nowadays. I believe the audience would like to know what can be done in order to ensure their safety?
21. W: This is not a good year to step out of your house therefore don't go out unnecessarily. If you really need to go out make sure don't wear too "bersih" (Clean). How about the colour? Wear more red colour shirts, avoid wearing yellow shirts and pants. Yellow might lead you to be brought to court. If more serious, it will cause bloody harm and damage to the body
22. Y: It is indeed a very lucky year for all of you! For businessmen I introduce to you guys a peaceful mascot, which is Iron Grill. Let me tell you, with this iron grill you will be free from the disturbances from all nuisances like loan sharks, gangsters and robbers. Not a problem at all.
23. J: Ladies, you have to buy branded bags. The more branded, expensive, and larger bags are even better. The more branded, expensive and larger bags are even better. You can then use the bag to shield yourself from the slash of a machete. Oh don't worry! Your branded bag is made from genuine leather. It can save your life. That's why I like to buy expensive branded handbags for self-defense and safety...
24. W: So sorry I have misunderstood you.
25. J: It's alright.
26. T: How about our children who are still schooling? Any tips for Education them?

27. W: The Star of Study for this year is good for people who are schooling. You don't need to bother about Chinese or Tamil education. One Malaysia One Language!
28. T: I heard the standard of our tertiary education has dropped tremendously as compared to previous years
29. Y: Let me tell you the standard of our colleges and universities is great, especially University of Malaya. Every student there is tall and strong physically. Moreover, everyone have a name that you can call as strong and stout (Ma Ta)! Moreover, our university ranks 167th in the world
30. Together: Malaysia Boleh!
31. T: Lady, please
32. L (in audience): Any tips for giving those naughty kids a good lesson? Protest/freedom of speech
33. J: Well, let me answer this. Those little kids who are naughty at one time want you to go out to the streets and then insist you step down [turun] you really don't need to be worried because it only happens once in 5 years. When they are naughty just give them some sweets to pamper them they will be obedient and keep quiet then but if they still don't shut their mouth then it's actually easier if we go to Gangnam District and look for Mrs Gangnam to dance for us then everything will be settled
34. W: Or, you can try to chant the following sutra: be steady, don't be soft
35. Y&J: Shut up!
36. T: For employers and employees, do you have any good advice in Investment terms of financial management and investment?

37. Y: This is such a good question, you all have to listen to me! For those who want to invest in property don't just look at local property. Base on my calculation the Star of Property appears at the North West direction. You can consider property at New York Manhattan. Houses there have very good *feng shui* and extremely cheap too. 7 room apartment only costs RM100 million. Super cheap.
38. J: I bought some for my son too.
39. Y: Good choice!
40. T: Yes, this audience
41. M [man in audience] IN this Year of the Horse if I wish to start MCA a business but only have limited capital, what can I do?
42. J: You don't have money and still want to start a business?
43. Together: "Sell Chinese" Mai Hwa
44. T: "Sell Chinese"? How to sell?
45. W: If you want to "sell Chinese", First must join the society, <http://www.cantonese.sh> entrance fees is RM25 only. After that you can be a "traitor" [二五 eik.co.uk/dictionary/words/39256/ 子女] this maling fella is in the dragon tiger group's 7 rank
- <http://www.mca.org.my/en/join-us/>
46. Y: After becoming a "traitor" you will certainly rise very fast in both position and wealth and you don't need to work so hard too.

47. J: Very little capital investment, no risk, and with high reward what else is better than “selling Chinese”?
48. T: How about this audience, you have anything to ask?
49. L2: Any advice for people who are still single or married? LO SI-MA
50. J: I’ll handle this, when we talk about relationship, let me tell you.
You must place a big horse in the obvious locations, dating place, wedding hall and room. Not a golden horse, nor a wooden horse but a horse made by nails and screws
51. Y: Ahhh...LO SI-MA (Horse made by nails and screws)
52. J: It helps to improve intimacy in your relationship with your spouse. You see how my husband loves me, then you’ll know
53. Y: Remember to wear beautiful lingerie, create a more romantic ambience and also wear pretty clothes
54. T: Aiya, listen to me! We have come to the end of the show. I wish Closing
to thank all our guests for your time to attend our show today
55. J: Whatever!
56. Y: You have to be smart, you listen to me!
57. Together: Yes! Yes! Yes!
58. W (chanting): be steady, don’t be soft....
59. J: You shut up
60. T: This new year, I, Teresa Kok, will work harder and put in more effort to be the voice of the people and continue to serve the people!
I am ready to fight against all injustice, corruption and undemocratic ruling!
61. J: I, Mrs Jit in this Horse Year wish all of you earn a lot of money
[ma bi].
62. Y: Listen to me! I wish all employees have good promotion Ma shang, etc.

63. W: I wish those who are in love to get married soon and have happy ending

64. All: We wish you all to have a “*ONEderful*” New Year of the Horse!